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No shortage of fuel or gas: Rajnath

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Tejas fleet likely to resume flying by next week: HAL

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

The Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas fleet is set to resume flying by next week after being grounded following a crash related to braking system issues, stated Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) Chairman Dr DK Sunil. He said, "The required clearance process is underway and the fleet could soon return to operations once certain checks are completed." He added, "The good news is that for the Tejas fleet, the LMC is done, there is a local modification committee civil action, which looks at this, so we expect this clearance by Wednesday." The fleet includes both fighter and trainer variants, with 36 aircraft operated by the Indian Air Force. "Out of 36, 2 have gone... so 34 are remaining," Sunil clarified. —*ANI*

SC raps WB after judicial officers 'held hostage'

Calls Bengal most polarised state, orders CBI/NIA probe

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, 2 APRIL

Supreme Court of India on Thursday termed West Bengal the "most polarised state" as it ordered a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation or National Investigation Agency into the gherao of judicial officers during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Malda.

A bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant criticised the state administration for "complete failure" and "inaction" after seven judicial officers, including three women and a five-year-old child, were held hostage for over nine hours without food or water at a BDO office in Kaliachowk on Wednesday. The court took suo motu cognisance of a letter from the Calcutta High Court Chief Justice detailing the incident.

Calling it a "brazen attempt" to browbeat judicial officers and challenge the authority of the apex court, the bench directed the Election Commission of India to deploy adequate Central forces at all SIR adjudication sites. It rejected claims of an "apolitical protest", terming the episode a "calculated, deliberate move".

Seven officers were rescued around midnight after being gheraoed from 3.30pm by protesters over deletion of names from electoral rolls —*x*

Seven officers were rescued around midnight after being gheraoed from 3.30 pm by "anti-social elements" over alleged deletion of names from electoral rolls. Around 700 judicial officers from West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand are currently handling over 60 lakh objections under the SIR process.

The court issued notices to the state Chief Secretary, DGP, and Malda district officials to explain why action should not be taken, and directed them to appear virtually on April 6. It also sought a preliminary report from the probe agency.

Meanwhile, protests against the SIR exercise spread across Malda, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Purba Bardhaman. Demonstrators blocked highways, burnt tyres and staged marches alleging large-scale deletion of voters' names. National Highways 12 and 27 were disrupted for hours, with clashes reported in Malda where police vehicles were vandalised and a driver injured.

The unrest comes ahead of the state's two-phase Assembly polls on 23 and 29 April. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

EC processes 50L voter records in SIR's 7th list

The Election Commission of India has processed nearly 49.63 lakh voter records under the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, officials said, with the seventh supplementary list released on Wednesday. At the draft stage in December 2025, about 58.2 lakh names were deleted, including 24.16 lakh deceased, 19.88 lakh shifted, 12.20 lakh untraceable and 1.38 lakh duplicates. Around 60 lakh voters were later placed under adjudication. Of these, 40–45 per cent cases disposed of so far have led to deletions, adding an estimated 13–17 lakh names to the total.

AMID GROWING RIFT

AAP drops Raghav Chadha as RS Deputy Leader

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

The AAP has written to the Rajya Sabha secretariat seeking the removal of its MP Raghav Chadha as the party's deputy leader in the House, and has proposed Punjab MP Ashok Mittal as his replacement, sources said on Thursday.

The letter states that Chadha, who is also a Rajya Sabha MP from Punjab, should not be allotted time for speaking in the House from AAP's quota.

The move comes amid Chadha's prolonged silence on matters related to the AAP.

Once considered a close confidant of Kejriwal, Chadha had played a key role in party affairs, particularly in Punjab and during the AAP's tenure in Delhi.

- Raghav Chadha posted a video on social media highlighting issues he raised as deputy leader of the party in the House, hours after being removed from the post.

However, things have changed. Chadha was abroad for medical reasons when Kejriwal was arrested in connection with the excise policy case in March 2024. He remained away during Kejriwal's incarceration and met him only a few days after his release on 13 September 2024.

More recently, Chadha maintained silence when Kejriwal, former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and other AAP leaders were discharged by a Delhi court in the excise case last month. He also missed Kejriwal's press conference and a rally at Jantar Mantar following the court's relief.

Party leaders claimed Chadha has been kept away from political campaigns and AAP's organisational matters in other states, although he has been vocal inside and outside Parliament raising issues like high air fares and the condition of gig workers. — *PTI*

ED raids IPAC Chief's Bengaluru home

BENGALURU, 2 APRIL

The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday raided the Bengaluru residence of Rishi Raj Singh, co-founder of I-PAC, as part of a multi-city operation spanning Delhi and Hyderabad in a West Bengal coal smuggling probe. The searches targeted premises linked to I-PAC executives. The agency alleges proceeds of crime from the coal pilferage syndicate were routed through entities connected to the firm, with a hawala operator facilitating transactions worth tens of crores. —*PTI*

>>>MORE ON PAGE 3

KARAGA: THE FESTIVAL OF HARMONY

Thousands took part during the Karaga Festival at Dharmaraya Temple in Bengaluru on Wednesday night. Chief priest Gnanendra Swamy carried the Karaga on a 26km procession, stopping at Tawakkal Mastan Shah Dargah, where Hindus and Muslims offered prayers —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Russian Deputy PM in Delhi for bi-lateral talks

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov arrived in New Delhi on Thursday for high-level discussions regarding defence, energy, trade and a range of other bilateral issues. Developments related to the ongoing West Asia conflict are also likely to feature prominently in the discussions. Manturov is scheduled to meet National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during his visit. Russia has once again emerged as the largest supplier of crude oil to India in recent weeks after a month-long waiver on US sanctions Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko co-chaired foreign office consultations in New Delhi early this week to reviewed the current state of bilateral ties and exchanged views on regional and global developments. —*PTI*

FROM 16 TO 18 APRIL

Govt calls spl Parl session likely for women's quota

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Parliament's Budget Session will reconvene on 16 April for a likely three-day special sitting to consider key bills, including those to implement the women's reservation law and increase Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 816. Both Lok and Rajya Sabha were adjourned till then

The government plans to amend the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, delink delimitation from the Census, and push enabling legislation, beginning in the Lok Sabha. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said a "very important bill" would be taken up soon.

The move has triggered a sharp political row. Leader of the House J P Nadda said the government has the prerogative to decide legislative timing, while Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge accused it of acting as a "bully" and seeking electoral gains.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh alleged the government was rushing the bill during elections, violating the Model Code of Conduct, and demanded an all-party meeting after April 29. Other opposition members, including AAP and regional parties, raised concerns over reservations for women in the Rajya Sabha, legislative councils, and sub-quotas for SCs, STs and OBCs.

The Congress also warned that increasing seats could disadvantage smaller states. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju informed Rajya Sabha that the House will meet again soon to consider a key legislation —*PTI*

Parl names Amaravati Andhra's capital

Parliament passed a bill on Thursday to recognise Amaravati as the sole, permanent capital of Andhra Pradesh with the Rajya Sabha giving its nod to it with a voice vote, and all parties except the YSRCP supporting the the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2026.

India to join UK-led talks on reopening Hormuz

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

India on Thursday accepted the United Kingdom's invitation to join talks on reopening the Strait of Hormuz amid the escalating West Asia crisis. The Ministry of External Affairs said the foreign secretary will attend the meeting, which will include about 35 countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Canada and the United Arab Emirates, though the United States will not participate.

India imports nearly 88 per cent of its crude oil, with 40–50 per cent transiting through the strait. US President Donald Trump said ensuring access was the responsibility of dependent nations.

Indian Navy chief Admiral DK Tripathi warned disruptions have caused economic and energy instability, noting rising competition over critical resources, deep-sea activity and illegal fishing.

The crisis began on 28 February after a joint strike by the US and Israel on Iran.

Meanwhile, Iran said "Indian friends" need not worry, assuring passage for friendly nations. Eight Indian ships have exited Hormuz, while 19 vessels carrying crude, LNG and LPG for India remain stranded. — *PTI*

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Chikkaballapur accident kills 2, including bride

CHIKKABALLAPURA, 2 APRIL

Two persons, including a newlywed bride, were killed instantly, and the groom was seriously injured when their car rammed a tanker from behind near Peresandra village on the Bengaluru-Bellary National Highway this morning. The deceased are Rakshitha Reddy, 28, and Pavan Reddy, 30, while Rajashekar Reddy, injured, was rushed to hospital in Bengaluru. Police Sub-Inspector Gunavathi said the incident occurred around 8.30am when the car, likely travelling at high speed, hit a slow-moving truck on an uphill road. Rajashekar Reddy, an IT worker from Avalige village, married Rakshitha four months ago. They was headed to Avalige for a religious festival when the tragedy occured, said a relative. —*SALAR NEWS*

Expedite DPR for Kolar govt medical college: MLA

KOLAR, 2 APRIL

Kolar MLA Kothur Manjunath instructed to prepare the DPR for the proposed Government Medical College in the district at a much faster rate on Thursday. He said the DPR should be prepared keeping in mind the "Vasthu". If everything goes as per the plan the work will start in about three to four months. About 22 acres of land, including forest land adjacent to Sanitorium building, is available, he said. Talks are on with Forest Department and steps will be taken to provide them alternative land near Madanahalli in Kolar Taluk, he added. Overall, about 35 acres of land would be available including the land on which present Sanitorium building, where the District health Office is functioning, he said. —*SALAR NEWS*

— PTI

Jazeera Airways to run Kuwait-M'luru bi-weekly flights

JMANGALURU, 2 APRIL

Kuwait-based Jazeera Airways will operate special bi-weekly charter flights between Kuwait and Mangaluru via Dammam starting April 8, officials said. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has granted permission for these limited operations, which will fly twice weekly on Wednesdays and Sundays. Passengers from Kuwait will travel by road to Dammam in Saudi Arabia, a journey of around six hours, with a halt at the Kuwait-Saudi border for immigration and security checks before flying to Mangaluru. The return journey follows the same procedure, with passengers returning by road from Dammam to Kuwait after border formalities. —*PTI*

BLANKET DRIVE

Dental surgeon Dr Nida distributed 100 blankets for children with cancer at the Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology, Bengaluru, on Tuesday —*SALAR*

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'Ending tax exemption for EVs hits middle class'

BJP slams Cong for making EVs costlier amid fuel crunch

BENGALURU, 2 APRIL

The BJP has slammed the State government's move to end tax exemption given to electronic four-wheelers like cars and omni buses, saying the move will make electric vehicles costlier. Notably, electric two-wheelers will continue to be exempted from tax.

"Years of tax support helped position the State as a serious player in India's EV ecosystem, encouraged investment, and made consumers more confident about shifting away from fuel dependence," State BJP President BY Vijayendra wrote on X.

But now, "a middle-class family trying to move to an electric vehicle will now be forced to pay a heavy additional burden because this government can no longer fund its political promises," he said.

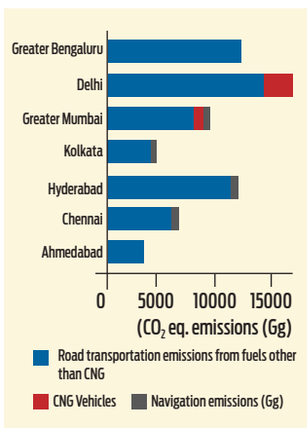
Under the revised structure proposed in the Karnataka Motor Vehicles Taxation (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which was passed by the State legislature, EVs priced up to Rs 10 lakh will attract a 5 per cent tax, those between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 25 lakh will be taxed at 8 per cent, and vehicles above Rs 25 lakh will attract 10 per cent tax.

Until now, Karnataka has been levying a 10 per cent lifetime tax only on EVs priced above Rs 25 lakh since 2024, and has exempted others to promote cleaner mobility.

Vijayendra noted that this was coming at a time of global instability and fuel price shocks. Any responsible government would make EVs more affordable, he said, but the "Siddaramaiah-led Congress government has chosen to tax this very alternative".

"It is clear that Congress has no growth plan, only a collection plan," he added.

The damage goes beyond cost, Vijayendra said, adding that "Bengaluru already ranks among the top 3 cities in the country for road traffic emissions, and yet Congress has chosen to make cleaner mobility harder, not easier. First, they mortgaged the future through reckless debt. Now they are taxing the very solutions." —*PTI*



Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao during the launch of the AI-based monitoring system, at KC General Hospital, in Bengaluru —*X @DINESHGRAO*

Govt launches AI monitoring system to improve dialysis

BENGALURU, 2 APRIL

The introduction of an AI-enabled monitoring system will significantly enhance patient safety and treatment quality under Karnataka's public-private partnership dialysis programme, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said on Thursday.

Launching the AI-based smart monitoring system at KC General Hospital in Bengaluru, he said such technological innovations bring dialysis services delivered under the PPP model on par with private healthcare standards.

The system, introduced by dialysis care provider NephroPlus, enables real-time monitoring of critical treatment parameters such as blood pressure, fluid removal and electrolyte balance during dialysis, aiming to improve patient outcomes through continuous oversight, a statement said.

Officials said the technology replaces periodic audits with always-on monitoring, offering a more transparent and robust governance framework.

It allows administrators and clinical teams to take data-driven decisions through continuous performance monitoring, it added.

Currently deployed across seven dialysis centres, the platform tracks 28 key parameters, including patient care, safety, bed availability, staff alertness, emergency preparedness, infection control, hygiene and operational efficiency, NephroPlus said in a statement. —*PTI*

BJP musn't talk finances, they favour rich: CM

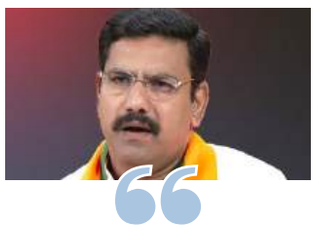
DAVANGERE, 2 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday accused the BJP of "favouring the rich", and told its leaders not speak about Congress' finances.

"There are two economic theories – trickle down theory and Universal Basic Income theory. BJP supports trickle-down—meaning they favour the rich. We believe in Universal Basic Income, which supports the poor," Siddaramaiah said when campaigning in Davangere South. Pointing to the Congress' five guarantees as an example of the Congress' planning, he said that Rs 52,000 crore is being spent on the scheme.

Siddaramaiah said that the Congress got overwhelming support for its candidate Samarth Shamanur, who is contesting the seat held by his grandfather, Shamanur Shivashankarappa, whose death necessitated the bypoll. He said people realised the BJP "did nothing" when it was in power for four years.

He also hit back at BJP leaders who spoke about Karnataka's borrowings.



To fill the empty treasury, you (Siddaramaiah) have opened wine stores and bars every 500 metres... Should we praise this as your economic expertise?

-BY Vijayendra, State BJP President

"When Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in 2014, national debt was Rs 51.06 lakh crore," Siddaramaiah said while campaigning in Davangere on Thursday. "By 2026–27, it has surged to Rs 214 lakh crore - about Rs 1.5 lakh per citizen."

The State's borrowings, however, remained within permissible limits, he said.

He also claimed the BJP was against minority communities. "When did the BJP ever show concern for AHINDA? They only talk about Hindutva," he said. —*PTI*

FROM JUMBO ATTACK VICTIM

Forest official caught demanding bribe

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 2 APRIL

An official from the Forest Department has come under scrutiny after a video surfaced allegedly showing him demanding a bribe from a farmer who lost areca nut and banana crops in a wild elephant attack.

The video, now widely circulating on social media, appears to show the official requesting the farmer to pay "money for expenses" while assessing the crop damage, drawing public criticism. According to Forest Department procedures, officials are required to visit sites affected by wild animals and prepare assessment reports, which determine government compensation.

The incident reportedly took place in Kanathi village, Chikkamagaluru taluk, where the farmer lost 65 areca nut trees. He is heard saying, "If you give money for expenses, I will increase the number, and you will get more compensation. If you don't pay, I will record only 65."

Veerabhadra Nayak was caught on video asking for bribe —*SCREENGRAB*

The officer has been identified as Veerabhadra Nayak, a Deputy Range Forest Officer posted at Kanathi Beat under the Chikkamagaluru Forest Division. When the farmer refused to pay, the officer reportedly waited briefly before recording the damage as 65 trees. —*PTI*

Cybercrimes, drug use rising: CM

BENGALURU, 2 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said that cybercrimes and drug-related offences are on the rise in the State and urged police to take measures and effectively use technology to curb such crimes.

He said that the Karnataka government intends to make the State drug-free and that police should use technology to "prevent" drug-related crimes.

Speaking at the annual 'Karnataka Police Flag Day' event, Siddaramaiah presented the Chief Minister's Medal to 158 police personnel in recognition of their exemplary service.

"In the last three years, there has been a decline in major crimes like murder, robbery, and theft. I compliment the police for this," Siddaramaiah said. However, "cybercrimes and drug- and narcotics-related offences are above the national average... and the conviction rate is also low."

The event was also attended by Home Minister G Parameshwara, senior Home Department and police officials. —*PTI*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Home Minister G Parameshwara honour policemen for their service during Police Flag Day at KSRP Grounds, Koramangala, in Bengaluru on Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

WOMAN BURNED WITH ACID IN KOLAR

KOLAR, 2 APRIL

A woman sustained burn injuries after allegedly being attacked with acid by a relative during a family reconciliation meeting in Azad Nagar on Wednesday evening.

The victim, Ruksana, was attacked by Ayesha, wife of Shabaz Ahmed, a labourer. Police said Shabaz's brother Saleem lived separately with his wife Ruksana, whom Shabaz allegedly supported financially and had an illicit relationship with.

After the couple recently fled to Bengaluru and were brought back, a meeting was convened. During it, Ayesha allegedly poured acid on Ruksana when she defended herself.

Ayesha was arrested. Superintendent of Police Kannika Sikrival visited the spot. —*Salar News*

DELHITE SELLS FAKE AYURVEDIC GOODS, HELD

TUMAKURU, 2 APRIL

Police on Thursday announced the arrest of a 56-year-old man from Delhi for allegedly manufacturing and selling counterfeit weight loss powder and spurious Ayurvedic products via e-commerce platforms using duplicate branding.

The accused, Rajeev Khanna, had been operating the business for around one-and-a-half years and confessed to even selling wheat flour in containers labelled as genuine Ayurvedic medicine.

His sons, Himanshu, 29 and Manan Khanna, 25 have also allegedly assisted their father. Both are absconding.

The matter came to light after Dhanalakshmi, owner of Jeeni Company in Tumakuru, filed a complaint with the police in August.

RK Traders of Delhi was misusing the trademark of Jeeni Company and selling products online.

The police registered a case against Khanna and conducted a raid at a godown in Shalimar Bagh in New Delhi. They recovered counterfeit Jeeni products, duplicate Ayurvedic tablets, beauty creams, and powders. Khanna is believed to have cheated Jeeni Company of over Rs 15 lakh. —*PTI*

'Pvt oil cos must sell LPG at same rate as public'

BENGALURU, 2 APRIL

Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa on Thursday said private oil companies have been instructed sell LPG at rates comparable to public sector outlets. Vehicles were reportedly lined up for about 1.5kms in various places of the City with no guarantee that all would get LPG.

"We are forced to stand in line for hours and feel helpless. The government needs to take action," an autorickshaw driver said.

But private oil companies had hiked LPG prices for vehicles, leading to long queues at public sector stations, Muniyappa told reporters. He said he plans to call a meeting with stakeholders either on Friday on 5 April.

He added that approximately 3,000 auto LPG cylinders are consumed daily, all of which are being supplied by the government.

"Autorickshaw drivers have been purchasing from private oil stations. Since the rates there are higher, they are coming to public sector stations, which is why queues have formed," he explained. He clarified that those who regularly procure LPG from government outlets have not faced any issues. —*PTI*

Auto rickshaw lined up at outside an LPG station on Devegowda Petrol Bunk Road, in Bengaluru, on Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

DOUBLE TRAGEDY

Techie ends life after son drowns in bucket

BENGALURU, 2 APRIL

A 29-year-old techie named Pratibha Wali allegedly committed suicide after her 11-month-old son accidentally drowned in a bucket of water at their residence, police said on Thursday.

The incident occurred on 1 April in Chandra Layout Police Station limits.

Police said a letter written in English by the woman was found near the bed, in which she stated that her son had drowned.

The matter came to light after the woman's husband, Mahantesh Wali, an engineer, filed a complaint with the police, officials said. The couple had a son named Agasthya.

Pratibha was employed at a tech company near Silk Board and had been working from home.

On 1 April at around 9 am, Mahantesh left for work. At around 6.30 pm, when he knocked on his house's door, there was no response. He tried phoning his wife, but she did not answer.

He then retrieved a spare key and entered the house. He found that his wife had hanged herself and had a cut on her left wrist, a police officer said.

Agasthya was found lying dead on the bed, the officer said.

An empty strip containing 15 tablets was also recovered, and it is suspected that the woman may have consumed it.

The infant allegedly strayed into the bathroom and fell into a bucket of water while the woman had gone to the terrace to dry clothes, but, the husband sought a probe. — *PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

Couple dies over family row

A young couple allegedly died by suicide in Nakkundi village near Ponnachi in Hanur taluk of Chamarajanagar. Nagendra, 21, and Nadiya, 19, took the step following a family dispute over marriage. Police have registered a case after the girl's father suspected foul play and sought investigation. —*SALAR NEWS*

Student kills self over rumours of affair with teacher

BENGALURU, 2 APRIL

A student at an Ayurveda at a college in Chitradurga allegedly died by suicide, as she was upset over rumours that she was in an affair with her professor.

According to the complaint filed by the student's father, Umashankar GN, the deceased, Likhita, shared a cordial relationship with Dr Raju, a lecturer at her college. Umashankar alleged that some of her classmates spread rumours suggesting an inappropriate relationship between the two.

Raju's wife Nisha reportedly heard the allegations, went to the college and shouted at 22-year-old Likhita.

Likhita said in the suicide note that was recovered from her home in Holalkere town that she took the extreme step due to the ridicule. She reportedly hung herself in her room.

She reportedly mentioned the names of the classmates in the note, who she said were mentally harassing her by spreading the allegations. Her parents, both school teachers, demanded strict action. —*Agencies*

BJP plotting unrest for Prez's rule: Didi

Blames EC for 'failing to protect' judicial officers, says all 'my power is taken away'

SUTI/SAGARDIGHI, 2 APRIL

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday intensified her attack on the BJP and the Election Commission (EC) over the gherao of judicial officers in Malda, alleging that Union Home Minister Amit Shah was orchestrating a "blueprint of conspiracy" to foment unrest and pave the way for President's Rule ahead of the Assembly polls.

Addressing rallies in Suti and Sagardighi in Murshidabad district, Banerjee urged people not to fall into the "BJP's trap" of riots, even as she accused the EC of failing to protect seven judicial officers engaged in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

"My powers have been taken away and Bengal has been defamed. Nobody from the administration informed me about the Malda incident," she said, referring to the gherao linked to alleged voter deletions.

Backing observations by the Supreme Court of India, which termed the incident "deplorable" and ordered an independent probe by the CBI or NIA, Banerjee said people had the right to protest but "no one should touch judges or judicial officers".

While condemning the incident, she blamed the EC for failing in its responsibility after assuming control of the administration following the poll announcement. "All my powers have been taken away. I have never seen such an Election Commission," she said, noting the transfer of key officials.

Banerjee alleged the BJP was seeking to polarise voters after failing electorally. "They think they can win through muscle power. Do not indulge in violence. Bengal will win again," she said, urging voters to defeat divisive forces democratically.

She claimed the unrest was part of a larger design. "The BJP's plan is to get elections cancelled and impose President's Rule," she alleged.

The Chief Minister also flagged large-scale voter deletions, claiming 40,000 names had been removed in her Bhabanipur constituency alone, affecting minorities, poor women and others.

Maintaining that those involved in the violence were not from the Trinamool Congress, Banerjee said she stood firmly for peace while warning against attempts to malign the state. —*PTI*

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addresses a public rally in support of TMC candidate from Sagardighi constituency, Bayron Biswas, ahead of the state Assembly Election in Murshidabad on Thursday —*PTI*

With chants of 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'BJP zindabad', the BJP on Thursday turned Suvendu Adhikari's nomination filing into a show of strength in Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Bhabanipur bastion. He was joined by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and state chief Samik Bhattacharya. Shah, atop a flower-decked truck, led a roadshow from Hazra —*PTI*

Shah pitches for change in Mamata's bastion

KOLKATA, 2 APRIL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah turned BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari's nomination filing from Bhabanipur into a high-voltage political spectacle, claiming he had a "shortcut" to bring about "paribartan" (change) in West Bengal by defeating Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in her own constituency.

Shah said while the BJP would otherwise have to win 170 seats to form the government with a comfortable majority, a victory for Adhikari in Bhabanipur alone would automatically change the political situation in the state.

Addressing a rally ahead of a massive roadshow from Hazra Crossing in south Kolkata before accompanying Adhikari for his nomination filing on Thursday, Shah framed the Bhabanipur contest not merely as another assembly seat battle but as the symbolic centrepiece of the BJP's campaign to unseat the Trinamool Congress government.

"I appeal to the people of Bhabanipur to ensure a massive victory for Suvendu Adhikari that for the liberation of the state," he said.

Shah said he had personally persuaded Adhikari to contest from Bhabanipur, the chief minister's pocket borough, instead of his traditional bastion of Nandigram.—*PTI*

ED raids I-PAC executive Vijay Nair in Bengal coal case

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday carried out fresh searches against an executive of political consultancy firm I-PAC, former AAP communication in-charge Vijay Nair and others in connection with an alleged West Bengal coal "scam".

Raids under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act were conducted across Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Delhi, covering premises linked to I-PAC co-founder Rishi Raj Singh in Bengaluru and Nair in Mumbai, officials said.

The case stems from a November 2020 FIR by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) alleging a multi-crore coal pilferage racket in Eastern Coalfields Limited mines in Kunustoria and Kajora near Asansol.

The ED has alleged that hawala operators linked to the smuggling network routed funds worth about Rs 20 crore to Indian PAC Consulting Pvt Ltd, the registered company of I-PAC, calling it one of the entities linked to such transactions.

Earlier searches in January covered I-PAC offices and premises linked to its founder Pratik Jain.

The ED has further accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of obstructing searches in Kolkata, a matter now before the Supreme Court.

The Trinamool Congress termed the raids a "desperate bid" by the BJP to derail its poll campaign, alleging vendetta politics and attempts to access its election strategy. —*PTI*

LoP in the Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi waves, as others look on, during a public meeting in Assam —*PTI*

RaGa unveils Cong manifesto for Assam, targets Himanta

BOKAJAN/TITABAR, 2 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday attacked Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma as the "most corrupt CM" in the country, alleging that he, along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, was running a "land ATM" in Assam.

Addressing rallies in Karbi Anglong and Jorhat, Gandhi alleged that land was being taken from people and handed to corporates, claiming 98,400 bighas had been transferred to three business houses. He said a Congress government would investigate corruption charges against Sarma and his family.

Gandhi also released the party's manifesto, outlining 11 focus sectors including governance, identity, healthcare, infrastructure, agriculture and climate change. The party has already announced five guarantees, including direct monthly support for women, Rs 50,000 assistance for women entrepreneurs, Rs 25 lakh health insurance for all families, and land pattas for 10 lakh indigenous people.

Promising decentralisation, Gandhi said Article 244(A) would be fully implemented, ensuring autonomy for Karbi Anglong and other Sixth Schedule areas. He accused the BJP of attempting to run Assam from Delhi and spreading division. He also criticised the BJP for failing to raise tea garden workers' wages and not granting ST status to six communities.

He said justice would be delivered to late singer Zubeen Garg within 100 days. —*PTI*

'NDA's betrayal includes stifling MSMEs'

ERODE, 2 APRIL

DMK President, Chief Minister MK Stalin, on Thursday, alleged that the NDA's betrayals include 'strangling' MSMEs during the ongoing West Asia crisis.

Addressing a rally here, Stalin said AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami had no achievements to claim for his government during 2017-21, like Modi who comes on "election tours" to Tamil Nadu.

Ridiculing the slow pace of work on the Madurai AIIMS, as that project was announced by the Centre about a decade ago, the CM said: "If they think they can claim an achievement, let them look at the Madurai AIIMS, being built one brick after the other." Other than the "achievement" of building the AIIMS for 10 years, they have nothing to boast, he said sarcastically.

Stalin said the refusal to scrap NEET and the rejection of new Metro projects were betrayals. "Abolishing" MGNREGA, amending the Citizenship Act, and the enactment of 3-farm laws, which were later scrapped, were also "betrayals". He also listed the other alleged "betrayals" of "failure to protect weavers" from US tariffs and the crippling of micro, small, and medium enterprises due to the Iran war. —*PTI*

Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister and DMK leader Udhayanidhi Stalin files his nomination papers from the Chepauk-Thiruvallikeni constituency in Chennai on Thursday —*PTI*

> I am concerned, Tamil Nadu needs an opposition party, no? We believe in democracy; you (AIADMK) should at least be in opposition, and I am saying this out of concern. Please take care
>
> -Kanimozhi, DMK leader takes a swipe at AIADMK over alliance with BJP

Vijay alleges conspiracy in stampede, seeks justice

TIRUCHY, 2 APRIL

Addressing an election rally in Tiruchy on Thursday, TVK chief Vijay alleged a "joint machination" and conspiracy behind both the tragic Karur stampede and the repeated delays of his final film, Jananayagan.

"I, who have come to ask justice for you, also want justice," Vijay said.

While asserting his own right to justice regarding the Karur incident—which claimed over 40 lives last September—Vijay also slammed the state and central governments for failing to prevent the current LPG cylinder shortage.

DMK made promises that he could not fulfil, deceiving the people, Vijay said, and labelled the government as "useless and corrupt."

"The poll battle is only between TVK and DMK. Our focus will be education, ration, health, drinking water, amenities in government-run schools, and transportation," he said. —*PTI*

TVK Chief submits his nomination from Tiruchirappalli East constituency on Thursday—*PTI*

—*PTI*

SC asks candidate to move tribunal over SIR deletion

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

The Supreme Court of India on Thursday allowed Congress aspirant Motab Shaikh to approach a newly formed appellate tribunal in Kolkata after his name was deleted from the electoral roll following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). A bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant directed him to seek relief before the tribunal headed by former Calcutta High Court Chief Justice TS Sivagnanam, asking for a decision by April 6. Shaikh has sought restoration of his name and permission to file nomination papers. The court noted he was a "mapped voter" and asked the Election Commission to examine his passport and assist in resolving the grievance promptly.—*PTI*

Forces want to break Punjab: BJP Chief on blast

CHANDIGARH, 2 APRIL

Punjab BJP working president Ashwani Sharma condemned the blast outside the party headquarters, blaming anti-peace forces for the act. He called it a cowardly incident and linked it to agitators opposing peace and brotherhood in Punjab. The explosion occurred at 5 pm on Wednesday when suspected crude explosive device was hurled near the office, causing no injuries but panic. Sharma referred to a social media video showing a man allegedly pulling a grenade pin and throwing it, while another recorded the act. He visited the site and said, "I am relieved there are no casualties." He added that the motive will be known after investigation and that Punjab Police and CRPF are deployed. Sharma blamed anti-Punjab elements for the incident, citing recent grenade attacks and Sidhu Moosewala murder.—*PTI*

As Rajya Sabha member, Nitish to get Z-Plus security

PATNA, 2 APRIL

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar will enjoy Z-Plus security after entering the Rajya Sabha, according to a state home department notification. Previously, Kumar had special security under the Bihar Special Security Act, 2000, similar to the SPG Act for the Prime Minister. The decision was taken because Kumar is set to leave his CM post to serve in Parliament. Elected on 16 March, he is expected to take over after the expiry of the terms of current members on 9 April. Kumar gave up his Legislative Council membership earlier this week, sparking speculation he may relinquish the CM position before or shortly after his swearing-in as a Rajya Sabha MP.—*PTI*

43% transplanted trees in Central Vista project died

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Around 43 per cent of trees transplanted under the Central Vista project have perished, the Lok Sabha was informed on Thursday. In a written reply, Minister of State Tokhan Sahu said 3,609 trees were transplanted, of which 1,545 died. Trees were relocated from different sites, including the new Parliament building, Common Central Secretariat (CCS), Vice President Enclave and Executive Enclave to locations such as NTPC Eco Park, Yamuna riverbank and Ghitorni. Expenditure rose from Rs 35.86 lakh in 2023-24 to Rs 122.92 lakh in 2024-25 and Rs 370.30 lakh in 2025-26. Major project components of the ambitious project, including the new Parliament building, have now been complete.—*PTI*

DURING PROCEEDINGS

Om Birla warns MPs against long chats in House chamber

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday cautioned Union ministers and MPs against having long conversations in the House when proceedings were underway and warned that he will name them in future.

As soon as the Zero Hour began at 12 noon, Birla said he has seen members and ministers talking for half-an-hour with each other during House proceedings.

He said short and important conversations were allowed but not long chats. "I will name you in future... it is important to maintain the dignity of the House," he said.

The speaker naming a member is considered an admonishment.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla conducts proceedings in the House during the second part of the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi —*PTI*

Earlier, during the Question Hour, the speaker had warned Independent MP Pappu Yadav against talking to a fellow member while showing back to the Chair. He said a senior member like him should desist from such behaviour. —*PTI*

LDF manifesto vows Rs 3,000 welfare pension, jobs for women

KOZHIKODE, 2 APRIL

Keralam Chief Minister and CPI(M) candidate from Dharmadam, Pinarayi Vijayan, on Thursday released the Left Democratic Front (LDF)'s manifesto for the State Assembly elections.

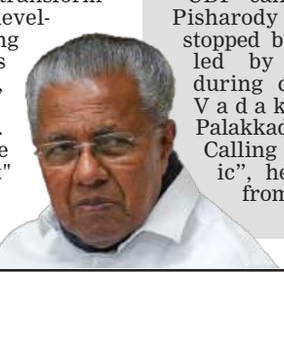
The CPI(M)-led LDF has promised the welfare pension to be increased from Rs 2000 to Rs 3000, eradication of absolute poverty, and 50 per cent job assurance for women in the state's labour force.

Vijayan said that the alliance's goal is to transform Keralam into a developed state, bringing significant changes in agriculture, industry, education, and health sectors. He also flagged the Centre's "neglect" towards the state.

The LDF has promised that various government schemes will be integrated at the district level to ensure complete care for bedridden patients and a healthy life for other elderly people.

LDF has announced 'Mission 100000', a scheme that will be formulated to upgrade one lakh small and medium enterprises to enterprises with an average turnover of one crore rupees. The government will provide support.

The ruling alliance has assured to provide rural economic development to 20 lakh housewives. Making Kerala State Road Transport Corporation profitable, having a power-cut-free Keralam also feature among the promises. Keralam will go to polls on 9 April. —*PTI*



UDF candidate stopped in Palakkad

UDF candidate Ramesh Pisharody was allegedly stopped by BJP workers, led by a councillor, during campaigning in Vadakkanthara, Palakkad, on Wednesday. Calling it "undemocratic", he drew support from Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who condemned the BJP's "intolerance" and said all candidates have a right to campaign.

BJP leader Sobha Surendra said the protest was over Pisharody's anti-women remarks and demanded an apology—*PTI*

—ANI

Delhi court jails Congress MLA Bharti for 3 years

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

A Delhi court sentenced Madhya Pradesh Congress MLA Rajendra Bharti and ex-bank employee Raghuvir Sharan Prajapati to three years' imprisonment for a cheating case involving forged bank records. The case covered illegal interest payments from 1998 to 2011. Special Judge Dig Vinay Singh also imposed a Rs 1 lakh fine on both. The duo was convicted on Wednesday for criminal conspiracy, cheating, forgery of security, forgery for cheating, and using a forged document as genuine. A detailed order is awaited. The court's decision aims to uphold justice in the case. —*PTI*

—INSTAGRAM

Author Padma Viswanathan in Booker shortlist

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Indian-origin Canadian-American writer Padma Viswanathan has been shortlisted for the 2026 International Booker Prize as the English translator of Ana Paula Maia's Portuguese novella. "On Earth As It Is Beneath" is described by judges as a "brutal, haunting novella" set in a Brazilian penal colony, where justice and cruelty blur. The GBP 50,000 prize is shared equally between author and translator. Last year, Banu Mushtaq and Deepa Bhasthi won for "Heart Lamp." Judges praised Maia's work as "unflinching" and "a dark fable about power." Viswanathan, a professor at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, has works published in eight countries. The list features mostly women from eight nations, showcasing diverse narratives from the past century. —*PTI*

Illicit liquor claims one more life in 'dry' Bihar

MOTIHARI, 2 APRIL

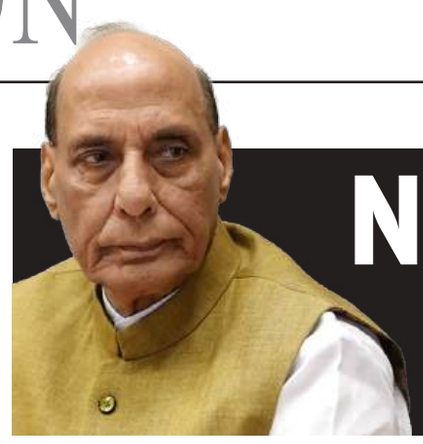
One person died, and two others were hospitalised after allegedly consuming spurious liquor in East Champaran, Bihar. The deceased, identified as Chandu, died after drinking illicit alcohol in Raghunathpur, with his body sent for post-mortem. Two others, Loha Thakur and Jitendra Shah, are stable in hospital, according to District Magistrate Saurabh Jorwal. Police are searching for the liquor supplier, who will be soon arrested. A high-level inquiry has been ordered. The Bihar government imposed a total alcohol ban in 2016. The exact cause of death will be confirmed after the autopsy is over. —*PTI*

Hyd woman techie ends life over dowry harassment

HYDERABAD, 2 APRIL

A 26-year-old software professional from Bihar died by suicide in Hyderabad, allegedly due to harassment by her husband over dowry. She was found hanging in her flat's hall by her husband. Police registered a case after her family's complaint, and her husband was detained. The woman, who was from Bihar, had been in a live-in relationship with a man from Madhya Pradesh since 2020, married him in February in Patna. They lived in Miyapur, Hyderabad. Recently, she faced mental harassment for extra dowry, and her husband also pressured her family to invest in his start-up. Police have apprehended the accused. Investigation is going on. —*PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support



No shortage of fuel or gas: Rajnath

Says Navy escorting Indian ships in Hormuz Strait

THIRU'PURAM, 2 APRIL

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Thursday that there is "no shortage of fuel or gas in the country" and that is India ready to tackle any energy crisis.

Speaking at a Sainik Samman Sammelan in Kerala, he said that Indian Navy ships were safely escorting the country's tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, a choke-point for maritime trade.

Singh also referred to cross-border terrorism and warned that if there was any "misadventure" from Pakistan, India's response would be "decisive."

He said that after NDA government came to power at the Centre, there has been zero tolerance towards terrorism.

He said that under Modi national security has been strengthened and the government's attitude has changed.

This, he said, was evident from 'Operation Sindoor', India's response to the Pahalgam terror attack of April 2025 which killed 26.

He said that during the Congress-led UPA governments, terror attacks were rampant in the country as no action was taken against them.

A notice at a petrol pump in Guwahati on Thursday says, 'Petrol out of stock' —*PTI*

He also mentioned the increasing importance of the maritime domain.

He said the maritime domain was no longer confined to trade routes and naval strength, but also has a role in "national resilience, growth, technological innovation and strategic autonomy."

He said that India is fast becoming self-reliant in defence matters. "In 2014, India's defence exports were worth Rs 600 crore and now it is Rs 38,500 crore," he said.

He said that there is a 62.66 per cent "record jump" in India's defence exports in 2025-26 compared to 2024-25.

"In defence production, we have already crossed the milestone of Rs 1.5 lakh crore, and our aim is to increase it to Rs 3 lakh crore by 2029-end," he said. — *PTI*

BJP, Congress lock horns over fuel availability

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

The BJP and the Congress fought on Thursday over LPG and fuel availability, a day after the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) meeting chaired by Prime Minister Modi reviewed the impact of the West Asia crisis on essential supplies.

On Wednesday Modi called for an 'all-out effort' to safeguard Indian citizens from the impact of the war in West Asia and stressed a modernised public information system to ward off misinformation or rumour-mongering.

The meeting was held to review measures taken by ministries and departments in view of the West Asia conflict, and discuss initiatives in that context, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

This was the second special CCS meeting on this issue, with the first held on 22 March.

The PM directed all concerned departments to take all possible measures to solve the problems of citizens and sectors affected by the global situation, the statement said.

Amid concerns over fuel supplies and prices, the BJP asserted that the government was proactively managing the situation, while the Congress questioned the ground-level availability of LPG and other petroleum products.

Accusing the Opposition of spreading panic, Union Minister Prahlad Joshi said, "People are trying to spread rumours. Standing here in Parliament, Rahul Gandhi said petrol and diesel will run out in two days. In our neighbouring countries, there are so many restrictions, but in our country, everything is running smoothly."

While the country is doing well during a global crisis, the mentality of opposing India itself while opposing Prime Minister Narendra Modi is very sad, he told the media inside the Parliament House complex. — *PTI*

A man carries an LPG cylinder in Navi Mumbai in Maharashtra amid disruptions in LPG supplies due to the West Asia war —*PTI*

SC stays denotification of Chambal Sanctuary's 732ha

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Slamming the Rajasthan government for "facilitating" illegal sand mining, the Supreme Court on Thursday stayed its notification denotifying 732 hectares of the National Chambal Sanctuary, saying it will not allow de-notification of any reserve land meant for protected species.

Terming "mining mafia" as "dacoits," the SC said a number of government officials, including sub-divisional magistrates (SDMs) and policemen have been killed in Rajasthan by the mining mafia.

The National Chambal Sanctuary, also called the National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary, is a 5,400 sq km tri-state protected area. Besides the endangered gharial (long-snouted crocodile), it is home to the red-crowned roof turtle and the endangered Ganges River dolphin.

Located on the Chambal River near the tri-point of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the sanctuary was first declared a protected area in Madhya Pradesh in 1978 and now constitutes a long narrow eco-reserve co-administered by the three states.

A bench of justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta observed that gharial and many other aquatic animals were on the verge of extinction. Terming the de-notification of 732 hectares area as a "serious issue," the SC told the counsel for Rajasthan that the state's notification has not passed muster through the required statutory requirements.

The bench was hearing a suo motu case titled 'In Re: Illegal sand mining in the National Chambal Sanctuary and threat to endangered aquatic wildlife'.

The Supreme Court made it clear that it would not allow the denotification of any reserve land meant for protected species. — *PTI*

BIZMAN BHASIN'S BAIL CANCELLED

The Supreme Court has revoked the bail earlier granted to businessman Satinder Singh Bhasin in connection with the alleged multicrore Grand Venice Mall scam in Greater Noida. A bench comprising Justices Sanjay Karol and NK Singh ordered Bhasin to surrender to jail authorities within a week.

The court noted that Bhasin had failed to comply with bail conditions imposed in November 2019. Bhasin may reapply for bail after 12 months, subject to compliance with insolvency proceedings.

The court also directed that Bhasin's passport remains with the court, not to be released without permission. Additionally, Rs 50 crore plus interest deposited as bail security will be forfeited, with a portion transferred to the National Legal Services Authority for its objectives, and the remainder to the insolvency process. The FIRs against Bhasin involve fraudulent land dealings affecting investors. — *PTI*

'S'pore report won't impact Assam case on Zubeen's death'

GUWAHATI, 2 APRIL

The proceedings in the Zubeen Garg death case in Assam will not be impacted in any way by the Singapore Police concluding its probe and maintaining that there is no evidence of foul play, officials said here on Thursday. Assam Police's investigation has been "comprehensive" and the charge sheet filed before the local court in Guwahati is based on it, they said.

"The charge sheet filed in Guwahati is on the basis of allegations of offences and premises which are different from those of the probe conducted by the Singapore Police" Advocate General Devajit Saikia maintained.

The probe in the state had taken a more comprehensive picture into account, going back to events over the last couple of years, SDGP MP Gupta, who headed the SIT, added.

The singer-composer drowned while swimming off Lazarus Island on 19 September, a day before he was slated to perform at the N-E Festival in Singapore.

A SIT of the Assam Police's CID probed the death and filed its charge sheet before a local court here in December 2025, naming seven accused. Four of them are facing murder charges. — *PTI*

INDIA'S DEFENCE EXPORTS HIT RECORD RS 38,424 CR

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

India's annual defence exports touched an all-time high of Rs 38,424 crore in fiscal 2025-26, registering a growth of 62 per cent over the previous fiscal, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Thursday.

The "big jump" in the defence exports reflected the growing "global confidence" in India's defence capabilities, Singh said in a social media post, adding that the country is "scripting an impressive defence exports success story."

"India defence exports have touched a new high with a record Rs 38,424 crore in F Y 2025-26. It marks a robust 62.66 per cent growth over the previous fiscal," the defence minister said.

"This big jump of Rs 14,802 crore in defence exports reflects the growing global confidence in India's indigenous capabilities and advanced manufacturing strength," he said. With DPSUs (defence public sector undertakings) contributing 54.84 per cent and private industry 45.16 per cent, this milestone showcases the power of a collaborative and self-reliant defence ecosystem, he said.

India's defence exports in 2024-25 were Rs 23,622 crore in 2024-25. It was Rs 21,083 crore in 2023-24. — *PTI*

'Argentinian football team deceived Kerala'

MALAPPURAM, 2 APRIL

Kerala Sports Minister V Abdurahiman claimed that the Argentina football team deceived the state by not coming to play a match despite receiving payment. Abdurahiman expressed his disappointment, saying, "I had really wanted the Argentina football team and Lionel Messi to come to Kerala and play."

He explained that he had engaged in several discussions to arrange the Rs 250 crore payment, but after receiving the money, the team cheated Kerala. The minister stated that Argentina had done this to five other countries as well, taking money but not fulfilling their commitments. "They took money from those countries, but never went there to play," he said. Abdurahiman indicated legal action might be necessary, asserting that the team must pay compensation.

- Kerala Sports Minister V Abdurahiman claimed that the Argentinian football team deceived the state by not coming to play a match after receiving a payment of Rs 250 crore

He expressed sadness over the betrayal, saying, "It has disappointed the football lovers of Kerala."

He also clarified his decision to contest from Tirur instead of Tanur, citing local development issues, insisting it would not affect his position in Tanur. The Kerala Assembly elections are scheduled for 9 April. — *PTI*

Follow the 'citizen first' mantra, PM tells officials

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Prime Minister Modi on Thursday emphasised the importance of constantly updating governance to keep pace with rapid changes, ensuring ease of living for citizens. Highlighting the core mantra "Nagrik Devo Bhava" (treating citizens as supreme), he stated that public service is being reoriented to be more capable and sensitive.

In a video message at the launch of 'Sadhana Saptah', Modi said governance must improve citizens' quality of life, and urged public servants to learn something new daily. "Our governance should ensure the quality of life of citizens improves. This is our true benchmark," he added. Calling for a cultural shift, he stressed that the focus is now on duty rather than just being an officer. He urged officials to consider how their decisions impact citizens. He also highlighted tech's role, especially AI, emphasising decision-making based on data. The Capacity Building Commission's event aims to empower every government employee, focusing on transparency and citizen-centric governance. —*PTI*

- Highlighting the core mantra 'Nagrik Devo Bhava' (treating citizens as supreme), Modi said that public service is being made more capable and sensitive

GOVT DATA REVEALS

20 Indians die abroad daily, mostly in Gulf

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

More than 20 Indian workers have died overseas each day over the past five years, with the vast majority of fatalities reported from Gulf countries, according to government data presented in Parliament.

In a written reply to the Rajya Sabha on 29 January, Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh said 37,740 Indian workers died abroad between 2021 and 2025. No cause-wise breakdown was provided.

The highest number of deaths was recorded in 2021 (8,234), followed by 6,614 in 2022. Fatalities rose thereafter to 7,291 in 2023, 7,747 in 2024 and 7,854 in 2025.

Gulf nations accounted for over 86 per cent of the deaths. The United Arab Emirates (12,380) and Saudi Arabia (11,757) reported the highest fatalities, followed by Kuwait (3,890), Oman (2,821), Malaysia (1,915) and Qatar (1,760). In total, 32,608 deaths were recorded in Gulf countries alone, averaging nearly 18 per day.

Indian missions received 80,985 complaints of abuse and labour issues during the period, led by the UAE (16,965), Kuwait (15,234), Oman (13,295) and Saudi Arabia (12,988).

A 2018 report by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative had estimated nearly 10 daily deaths in the Gulf between 2012 and mid-2018. Despite low fatalities, Southeast Asian nations reported rising grievances. Myanmar recorded no deaths but 2,548 complaints, while Cambodia (31 deaths) and Laos (11) logged over 2,400 complaints each. Complaints peaked at 22,479 in 2025.

Key issues included unpaid wages, passport confiscation, excessive working hours, leave denial, job losses and refusal of exit permits. — PTI

RAVI VARMA PAINTING SOLD FOR RECORD RS 167 CR

Eminent Indian artist Raja Ravi Varma's iconic oil painting 'Yashoda and Krishna' has set a new benchmark in Indian art, selling for a record Rs 167.2 crore at Saffronart's Spring Live Auction in Mumbai on Wednesday. The sale makes it the most expensive work of modern Indian art ever auctioned surpassing MF Husain's 'Untitled (Gram Yatra)', which fetched over Rs 118 crore last year. The masterpiece was acquired by Cyrus S Poonawalla, Managing Director of Serum Institute of India. Painted in the 1890s at the height of Varma's career, the work depicts Yashoda milking a cow as infant Krishna reaches for milk. Born in 1848 into the aristocratic Kilimanoor family of Travancore, Raja Ravi Varma is widely regarded as a pioneer of early modern Indian art. Varma popularised oil painting in India and was among the first Indian artists to combine European academic realism with Indian mythological subjects —PTI

Assam youths wooed with fee waivers, job promises

From promising free education to assuring jobs for the youths, political parties are wooing the young voters ahead of the Assam Assembly elections as they form a major chunk of the electorate.

The ongoing schemes providing fee waivers and stipends give the ruling regime an edge when it comes to attracting the young voters, but larger issues of affordable new-age courses, quality of education in the public sector and dignified employment opportunities also remain to be addressed.

Out of total 2.50 crore electorate in the state, there are over 6 lakh new voters in the age bracket of 18-19 years, and another over 66 lakh in the 20-29 years bracket.

"As Assam heads towards the elections, the inclusive policy approach that the current dispensation has taken towards the state's youth can certainly become a definitive factor in its electoral performance," said Karavi Barman, assistant professor at the Post-Graduate Department of Law, Gauhati University.

She maintained that schemes such as 'Nijut Moina', 'Nijut Babu' and SVAYEM have been instrumental to a large extent in providing students and youth with means to pursue their education and build careers by surpassing economic barriers.

Under 'Nijut Moina', a flagship programme of the current government aimed at preventing child marriage and dropout rates, a monthly stipend of up to Rs 2,500 is provided to all girl students from class 11 to post-graduation since 2024.

A similar 'Mukhya Mantrir Nijut Babu Asoni' was launched in January, under which monthly support for first year undergraduate and postgraduate boys will be provided, to help prevent dropouts.

Other schemes of the BJP-led government for students include, 'Jibon Prerena' under which fresh graduates receive total of Rs 25,000 for a year, and 'Jibon Anuprerna', providing one-time stipend for research scholars.

The ongoing schemes providing fee waivers and stipends give the ruling regime an edge when it comes to attracting the young voters -PTI

The Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhiyan (CMAAA) and Swami Vivekananda Assam Youth Empowerment (SVAYEM) are among other schemes that help youth launch entrepreneurship ventures.

Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) state secretary Manash Pratim Kalita maintained that these schemes have benefitted the students, especially those belonging to economically-weaker sections.

"The schemes for the students over the last 10 years have been commendable. It has particularly helped students coming from poorer families, as earlier, they could not afford higher education," he said.

"The scholarship or stipend money provided helps pay for the education, buy essential stuff, and even pay for form fill-up without putting additional burden on our families," Mahanta added.

However, Students' Federation of India (SFI) state joint secretary Utpola Das claimed that the schemes are temporary fixes rather than providing long-term solutions.

"On the ground, the existing schemes are failing to keep students in the system. What the education sector truly needs are durable, structural interventions such as merit-based scholarships rather than schemes that merely create passive 'beneficiaries'," she maintained.

Echoing Das, SFI state secretary Rajdeep Mahanta said, "The number of government higher education institutions is not sufficient vis-à-vis our students. Moreover, after the implementation of NEP-2020, we have witnessed an increase in self-financed courses. These are deterrents for students who do not come from affluent families."

"The autonomous status being granted to colleges and universities is proving to be another hurdle as it entails the institution to generate its own revenue, and for the purpose, the burden is shifted to students by way of increasing fees," he claimed.

While the BJP has promised to continue these schemes with more entitlements if it retains power, the main opposition Congress has put its focus on job opportunities within the state.

Beyond the electoral assurances, Barman stressed on the need to make the students ready to meet the requirements of the changing job market.

"Not just traditional colleges and universities, we need public institutions which prepare students for future courses and jobs. Like coaching for competitive examinations, a sector which is dominated by the private sector," the assistant professor said.

"And along with educational facilities, employment opportunities are another factor that the government must work on to secure the future of our young generation," she said.

Manash Pratim said the schemes for youths promoting entrepreneurship have helped them to be 'job providers' rather than being mere 'job seekers'.

"Under programmes like CMAAA, youth are getting seed money, and they are aspiring to open their own businesses rather than running after jobs," he said.

SFI secretary Rajdeep, however, maintained that the youths of the state need to be given more opportunities to realise their potential and aim higher.

"Being gig workers cannot be the aspiration of our generation. While there is dignity in every work, we do need meaningful employment that does justice to our education," he said. —PTI

SALAR

Night heatwaves emerging as new threat in India: Study

- A new analysis has found that heat risk in Indian cities is increasingly being shaped not only by daytime heatwaves but also by night-time heatwaves and compound heatwaves, which occur when a daytime heatwave is followed by a night-time heatwave. This is significant because current Heat Action Plans (HAPs) and urban climate policies mainly focus on daytime heatwaves, according to the study.

A new analysis has found that heat risk in Indian cities is increasingly being shaped not only by daytime heatwaves but also by night-time heatwaves and compound heatwaves, which occur when a daytime heatwave is followed by a night-time heatwave.

This is significant because current Heat Action Plans (HAPs) and urban climate policies mainly focus on daytime heatwaves, according to the study. A HAP serves as an early warning system and preparedness plan for extreme heat events.

In an interview with PTI, Kashif Imdad, a co-author of the study and associate professor of geography at Kanpur's Pandit Prithi Nath (PPN) PG College, said, "Most state and district plans, including the Uttar Pradesh State Plan, focus almost entirely on daytime heatwaves. We have not identified night-time and compound heatwaves as a problem yet."

The findings align with what several other studies have been observing in India and around the world for years: night-time temperatures are steadily increasing.

For instance, a 2025 study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) revealed that between 2012 and 2022, the number of very warm nights increased faster than very warm days.

Over 70 per cent of districts witnessed five or more additional very warm nights per summer (March to June) during this period, according to the CEEW analysis.

These developments are concerning, as higher temperatures during the night make it difficult for the body to cool down after intense daytime heat, which can lead to a rise in health risks such as heat stroke and worsening of non-communicable diseases like diabetes and hypertension.

The latest study, 'Night-time and compound heatwaves as emerging climate risks in India's smart cities', was published in the journal Physics and Chemistry of the Earth on March 12.

The analysis was conducted by Imdad, Anubha Yadav, a PhD scholar at PPN PG college, Archana Chaudhary, a researcher at Kanpur's Vikramajit Singh Sanatan Dharma College, and Rayees Ahmed, a researcher at Bengaluru's Indian Institute of Science.

For their study, the researchers developed a diurnal persistence index to analyse 100 Indian smart cities and find where daytime, night-time, and compound heatwaves existed for the period between 2001 and 2024.

"We categorised Indian smart cities into plain, plateau, coastal, and hill areas. In the Indo-Gangetic plain cities, there is a mixed regime (daytime heatwaves are declining), but compound and night-time heatwaves are rising. In southern Peninsular India, daytime heatwaves dominate. In coastal and hill cities, night-time heatwaves dominate," Imdad stated.

Notably, between 2001 and 2024, Srinagar experienced the highest frequency of daytime and compound heatwaves among the 100 smart cities.

While Gujarat's Dahod saw the most intense compound heatwaves, Varanasi experienced the most intense night-time heatwaves, and Imphal the most intense daytime heatwaves.

To tackle rising night-time temperatures, authorities need to develop HAPs and urban climate policies that prioritise interventions which directly reduce night-time heat retention and enhance night-time cooling.

These measures may include implementing cool roofs, improving natural ventilation and ventilation corridors, and expanding urban greenery.

The study said, "Public health responses should explicitly incorporate hot night warnings, the provision of night-time cooling shelters, reliable electricity supply for cooling and risk communication focused on cumulative heat exposure rather than daytime extremes alone."

However, Imdad cautioned that these interventions should be tailored to specific local conditions.

"For example, cool roof technology is suitable for cities where temperatures stay high year-round, like in South India or parts of Gujarat. In places like Lucknow, temperatures soar to 47 degrees Celsius in summer but drop to minus one degree Celsius in winter. If you paint the roof to be cold, you might save people in summer, but they could die from the cold in winter, especially vulnerable populations in huts," he said.

Therefore, in Lucknow, for example, one needs to install removable cool roofs, such as plants, seeds, or green mats used in nurseries, which can be removed in winter. —PTI

A 2025 study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) revealed that between 2012 and 2022 the number of very warm nights increased faster than very warm days —PIT

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Delhi eateries battle 'shame' of shutting down amid LPG crisis

- For Neeraj Chawla, who has been running Vaishno Rasoi in Rajouri Garden for the past year, the struggle is both financial and personal. Shutting shop would make sense, he confides, but it is the fear of "beizatti" (shame) that keeps his stoves, now running on coal and wood, alight even as hope begins to flicker.

Small eateries, long the backbone of the bustling food streets of the national capital, are losing their spark. Pushed by dwindling LPG supply and soaring black-market prices, many are being forced to reshape menus, reduce staff, and return to cooking on coal and wood.

For Neeraj Chawla, who has been running Vaishno Rasoi in Rajouri Garden for the past year after stepping away from a joint family setup, the struggle is both financial and personal.

Shutting shop would make sense, he confides, but it is the fear of "beizatti" (shame) that keeps his stoves -- now largely running on coal and wood -- alight, even as hope begins to flicker.

"Beizatti nahi ho ke band karke baith gaya hai, isiliye chala raha hoon (I keep it running to avoid the shame of shutting down)," Chawla told PTI, explaining why he continues despite high operational costs and mounting losses.

Amid the West Asia crisis, the government has revised the priority order for allocating domestically produced natural gas, placing LPG production alongside CNG and piped cooking gas at the top. This has led to an alleged supply crunch for hotels and restaurants which use market priced commercial LPG.

With daily sales, which once hovered around Rs 12,000 on a good day, slipping further as coal and wood double cooking time and reduce efficiency, Chawla has already had to lay off two staff members.

From neighbourhood staples like KK Da Dhaba in Tagore Garden, a stone's throw from Chawla's eatery, to Khadak Singh Da Dhaba in Malviya Nagar, farther across the city, small eateries are facing the same struggle.

Pankaj Dawar at KK Da Dhaba has turned to coal and slashed fried items from the menu.

Disappointment was written large on his face as he said, "No layoffs yet. But LPG prices in the black market are crazy, beyond reach of most people."

People familiar with the situation said that a cylinder, typically priced between Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,500, is now being sold for anywhere between Rs 3,000 and Rs 4,500.

The situation is more worrisome for Rajinder Singh Bhandari, owner of Khadak Singh Da Dhaba, who hasn't had LPG for a week.

"No non-veg, only a temporary stove on the tandoor. LPG mil hi nahi raha (can't find LPG anywhere)," he says, adding that daily sales have fallen from Rs 30,000 to half.

A woman waits with empty LPG cylinders outside a gas agency to avail a refilled one amid the ongoing supply crisis in Uttar Pradesh's Kanpur on Thursday -PTI

To think that only small eateries are bearing the brunt of the situation would be misleading. Franchise chains and plush cafes alike are in the same boat, scrambling for quick-fixes to minimise losses and keep their kitchens afloat.

The sudden LPG shortage has forced restaurants to rethink how they cook, and Secret Ingredient, a consultancy that advises restaurants, has been fielding nonstop calls.

"We've been actively working with brands to identify credible induction and electric equipment partners, including solutions that can handle high-intensity formats like woks and bulk cooking.

"Alongside this, we're helping teams rethink menu design and prep structures to reduce unnecessary gas dependency, whether through smarter batching, sequencing, or reallocating certain processes to alternative heat source," said Sid Mathur, founder-director of Secret Ingredient.

Popular chains such as RollsKing, trendy casuals like Bomba Pizzeria & Taqueria, and high-end Moroccan-inspired restaurant Sorbo in Gurugram are adjusting to these new realities.

Even Bomba's signature items have felt the pinch. At its MG Road outlet, Neapolitan pizza bases, known to be gas-guzzling, are temporarily off the menu.

"Yes, the LPG shortage has impacted us like everyone else in the industry. We're adjusting cooking processes, being more mindful with gas, and reworking kitchen workflows to maintain quality and the guest experience," said chef Alisha Mehra, founder of Bomba.

At Sorbo, the adaptation has been more radical.

Frying and steaming have moved to electric alternatives, the pizza oven now runs on apple wood, and the clay oven uses lava stone to slash gas use. Even iconic slow-cooked dishes like 'Moroccan Lamb Tagine' and 'Truffle Mushroom Soup' have been paused.

"These changes keep operations running without compromising quality," said founder Bhagyesh Tekriwal, adding that the LPG crisis and spike in prices has slashed margins further in an already tight industry.

RollsKing, too, with few alternatives in sight, has executed a rapid shift from gas-fueled systems to electric alternatives.

The move, while necessary to keep operations running, brought its own set of challenges.

"It hasn't been entirely smooth. Traditional gas tawas heat up and recover faster than electric plates, which has slightly slowed prep times and temporarily reduced order volumes.

"This is a short-term adjustment, and as our teams get accustomed to the electric systems, we expect service speed to return to normal soon," explained RollsKing co-founder Arjun Toor. —PTI

—PTI

1 killed as 7.4 quake jolts Indonesia

MANADO, 2 APRIL

An undersea earthquake measuring 7.4 magnitude struck northern Indonesia, causing buildings to collapse, killing at least one, and triggering a small tsunami. Waves up to 75 cm were recorded shortly after. Indonesia's meteorological agency lifted its tsunami warning hours later, and the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology confirmed no destructive threat to the country. Strong shaking lasting 10 to 20 seconds was felt in Bitung and Ternate, with initial damage assessments noting damage to a church and houses in Ternate. A 70-year-old woman died in a building collapse in Manado, and three were hospitalised. Nearly 50 aftershocks were felt in nearby areas, with residents describing the quake as very strong. —*PTI*

Republicans announce plan to end DHS shutdown

WASHINGTON, 2 APRIL

House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Majority Leader John Thune plan to fully fund the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), ending the 47-day partial shutdown. Funding will be through a bipartisan agreement, excluding ICE and Border Patrol, which will be funded later via party-line legislation. The strategy could face opposition within the GOP. Johnson and Thune expressed hope to move past the deadlock. Republicans previously rejected a bipartisan plan, which led to the shutdown. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer criticised the divisions, calling them "dysfunction." The plan's success will depend on support from both chambers, with the shutdown impacting airport security and services nationwide.—*PTI*

US lifts sanctions on Venezuela's Delcy Rodríguez

WASHINGTON, 2 APRIL

The US announced lifting of sanctions on Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez, as per the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control. This move signals Washington's recognition of her as Venezuela's legitimate authority. The US has already recognised her as the country's head of state in diplomatic and legal matters. The sanctions relief follows the US military's detention of Rodríguez's predecessor, Nicolás Maduro, and his wife in Caracas on 3 January, on drug trafficking charges. They have pleaded not guilty. The US's engagement with Venezuela's interim government reflects a shift in diplomatic stance, with the recognition of Rodríguez as a key leader amid ongoing political tensions. —*PTI*

US vows weeks of more strikes to send Iran 'back to Stone Age'

Trump claims victory; tells countries to have courage and 'take Hormuz'

WASHINGTON, 2 APRIL

President Donald Trump said US forces will keep hitting Iran "very hard" in the next two or three weeks to send the Iran "back to the Stone Ages, where they belong", in his first national address since the conflict began more than a month ago.

Simultaneously, Trump claimed that the "core strategic objectives are nearing completion". He recounted US' previous wars, such as the two World Wars, the Vietnam war and the Iraq invasion, and claimed his "military operation" against Iran had decimated the Islamic Republic faster than any of Washington's previous conflicts.

"One of the most powerful countries" is "really no longer a threat," he claimed on Wednesday. "We are going to finish the job, and we're going to finish it very fast. We're getting very close."

But Trump's address to the nation, which is typically reserved for major announcements, had no mention of sending in ground troops or a timeline.

Trump didn't say anything about negotiations with Iran or bring up the 6 April deadline he set for Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz, as he approaches his 60-day countdown, following which he would need Congressional approval for the war.

He claimed again to have obliterated Iran's nuclear capabilities, but qualified that the US would strike harder if it had evidence that the Islamic Republic was building a nuclear bomb.

However, Trump told countries reliant on oil through the Strait of Hormuz to "build some delayed courage" and go "take it".

Hours before the speech, Trump said at a White House Easter lunch, "We could just take (Iran's) oil".

"But you know, I'm not sure that the people in our country have the patience to do that, which is unfortunate," he said. "If we stayed there, I prefer just to take the oil."

Trump also berated NATO and US allies. He said let South Korea or Japan open the Strait. He added that NATO couldn't do much if the US needed its help. —*PTI*

WEST ASIA WAR
DAY-35

WHAT THE 'KING' SAID

US President Donald Trump jokingly said that "they call me king now", a reference to the massive anti-govt 'No Kings' protests. "I'm such a king I can't get a ballroom approved," Trump quipped, adding "I could be doing a low if I was a king."

NUCLEAR DUST IN IRAN?

Trump said that Iran's nuclear sites had been hit "so hard" with B2 Bombers that it would take months to even get close to the "nuclear dust". It is unclear if it was just rhetoric, as US recently bombed Isfahan.

'REGIME ALREADY CHANGED, BUT NOT OUR GOAL'

Trump said "regime change" in Iran was not the US' goal, but it had been changed anyway, because of their "original leaders' death. They're all dead." He said the "new regime" is much less radical.

'MACRON'S WIFE TREATS HIM BADLY'

Trump said French President Emmanuel Macron's wife Briggete Macron "treats him extremely badly". He said Emmanuel was still recovering from "the right to the jaw", a reference to a video of Briggete pushing his face. Trump also mimicked Macron's accent.

> **Iran's air force... navy... (and) military industrial base is degraded. And so too is its capacity to launch missiles. That is a good thing. And now those objectives have been realised, it is not clear what more needs to be achieved or what the end point looks like. What is clear is that the longer the war goes on, the more significant the impact on the global economy will be.**
>
> —Anthony Albanese, Australian Prime Minister

Is the war in your interest? Iran Prez to Americans

DUBAI, 2 APRIL

Iran's President **Masoud Pezeshkian** penned an open letter to US citizens asking if the war was in their interests. He said US could choose to confront or engage with Iran.

"Was there any objective threat from Iran to justify such behaviour?" Pezeshkian said in the letter on Wednesday.

He claimed that US had entered the war as a proxy for Israel.

Noting that Iran, in its modern history, had never chosen aggression "despite possessing military superiority over many of its neighbours", he added that Tehran posed no imminent threat.

"Today, the world stands at crossroads. Continuing along the path of confrontation is more costly and futile than ever before. The choice between confrontation and engagement is both real and consequential; its outcome will shape the future for generations to come," Pezeshkian said. "Throughout its millennia of proud history, Iran has outlasted many aggressors. All that remains of them are tarnished names in history, while Iran endures — resilient, dignified, and proud." —*PTI*

AROUND THE WORLD

US embassy warns of attacks in Baghdad

The US Embassy in Baghdad warned citizens on Thursday that Iran-linked militias in Iraq "may conduct attacks in central Baghdad in the next 24-48 hours" on US citizens and US-linked sites. Though not the first, this warning was unusually specific about potential attacks.

Mojtaba calls for national restoration drive

Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei called for a comprehensive nationwide drive to restore infrastructure and nature. According to a statement aired on Press TV on Iran's National Nature Day, he said that the US-Israeli airstrikes specifically "targeted its land and natural environment".

Don, MBZ talk 'Iranian terrorist aggression'

United Arab E President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed and Trump discussed the "the ongoing Iranian terrorist aggression against the UAE and other countries in the region" and other "regional developments". The UAE is reportedly pushing for a US ground invasion.

China speaks to 'all parties' on Hormuz

China on Thursday said that it is in communication "with all parties" about the need to restore stability in the Strait of Hormuz, and that everyone should work toward that end. "We believe that an early ceasefire and... stability in the Strait is a common aspiration of the international community," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said.

Choose EU or Russian bloc: Putin to Armenia

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday warned Armenia, which aspires to join the European Union, that it won't be able to be part of both the EU and a Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union. The bloc, including Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, is a single market allowing the free movement of goods, capitals and labour.

'Won't surrender till US humiliated'

TEHRAN, 2 APRIL

The Iranian military on Thursday dismissed US President Donald Trump's of a ceasefire request, saying that the war will continue until Washington faces "permanent humiliation and surrender".

According to the statement issued by the spokesperson for the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters aired on Press TV, Iran rejected US claims about damaging Iran's military infrastructure and capabilities, asserting that US intelligence regarding Iran's military strength remains "incomplete".

"You know nothing of our vast strategic capabilities. Do not assume you have destroyed our strategic missile production sites, long-range attack and precision drones, modern air-defence systems, electronic warfare, or special equipment," the spokesperson said.

STRIKES CONTINUE

Strikes continued as Iran hit the town of Haifa in Israel and continued its attacks on Gulf.

Sirens sounded in Bahrain, home to the US Navy's 5th Fleet, explosions were heard in Dubai as air defences worked to intercept an Iranian missile barrage, and Saudi Arabia said it intercepted four drones.

Israel and the US continued to bombard Iran as well, with blasts destroying key infrastructure, including hospitals, bridges and universities. At least 3,000 people have been killed in the war, primarily in Iran and Lebanon.

AMAZON HUB HIT IN BAHRAIN

An Amazon cloud computing centre in Bahrain reportedly suffered damages after an attack.

Iran's IRGC said it launched an attack on the facility, after threating to strike technology companies in the region.

LEBANON DECRIES OCCUPATION

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said that Israel's talks on setting up a buffer zone south of the Litani river is "a significant expansion in the occupation of Lebanese territory". He noted that 1 million people had already been displaced by Israeli aggression. India, meanwhile, denounced Israeli strikes that killed several UN peacekeepers in Lebanon. —*Agencies*

The Pasteur Institute of Iran, one of the oldest leading research and public health centers, was damaged by strikes; People try saving cows after a misisle hit Tabriz on Thursday —X@@IRIMFA_SPOX/X@PRESSTV

35 countries gather in UK on opening Hormuz

LONDON, 2 APRIL

Almost three dozen countries were set to meet on Thursday to exert diplomatic and political pressure to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Keir Starmer said the virtual meeting, chaired by Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper, will bring together key stakeholders to address the crisis.

He added that it will assess all viable diplomatic and political measures to restore freedom of navigation, ensure the safety of trapped ships and seafarers, and resume the movement of vital commodities.

Iranian attacks, or the threat thereof, on commercial ships have halted nearly all traffic in the waterway, and sending petroleum prices soaring.

Although Trump has said securing the waterway is not America's job, no country appears willing to try and open the Strait by force.

Thursday's meeting is considered a first step to a statement issued by 35 countries including the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan and the United Arab Emirates on contributing "to appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage" through the waterway.

This carries echoes of the Coalition of the Willing effort for Ukraine, a show of strength in the face of a Trumpian threat.

This is compounded with Trump considering leaving NATO alliance.

NATO Chief Mark Rutte is flying to Washington next week to meet with the US President. —*Agencies*

1974 Utah teen death linked to Ted Bundy

SPANISH FORK, 1 APRIL

New DNA testing has conclusively connected the 1974 unsolved death of Utah teenager Laura Ann Aime to the infamous serial killer Ted Bundy, according to the local sheriff's office. Aime, 17, went missing on Halloween night, after leaving a party alone to visit a convenience store. Her body was discovered about a month later, on the side of a highway, bound, beaten, and unclothed. Investigators long suspected Bundy, who reportedly acknowledged his culpability before his execution. Bundy, one of the most prolific serial killers in US history, was linked to at least 30 women's deaths across several states in the 1970s. His crimes and his arrest attracted widespread fascination due to his charm. —*PTI*

ARTEMIS II

NASA sends 1st crew to moon in 50 years

CAPE CANAVERAL, 2 APRIL

NASA launched the historic Artemis II mission on Wednesday, sending a crew of four toward the moon for the first time since 1972. This test flight is the critical precursor to a scheduled lunar landing in two years.

Accompanied by mission Commander Wiseman, the crew includes pilot Victor Glover, mission specialist Christina Koch, and Canada's Jeremy Hansen. This historic group represents humanity's most diverse lunar crew to date, featuring the first woman, the first person of colour, and the first non-US citizen to journey in NASA's Orion capsule.

Artemis II set sail from the same Florida launch site that sent Apollo's explorers to the moon so long ago. The Space Launch System rocket thundered into the early evening sky, a nearly full moon beckoning some 248,000 miles (400,000 km) away.

NASA's Orion spacecraft lifts off on the Artemis II mission from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida —*PTI*

The astronauts will stick close to home for the first 25 hours of their 10-day test flight, checking out the capsule in orbit around Earth before firing the main engine that will propel them to the moon.

NASA had to overcome a flurry of last-minute technical issues as liquid hydrogen began flowing into the Space Launch System. Leaks during a fueling test in February had forced a two-month flight delay, but to NASA's relief, the operation proceeded without incident.

The danger is right up there for Artemis II. NASA has refused to release its risk assessment for the mission. The launch team successfully loaded over 2.6 million litres of propellant into the 32-story rocket, clearing the final major technical hurdle.

Five minutes into the flight, Commander Wiseman saw the team's target: "We have a beautiful moonrise, we're headed right at it," he said from the capsule. —*PTI*

Pakistan holds talks with Afghan's Taliban govt

ISLAMABAD, 2 APRIL

Pakistan on Thursday confirmed it was holding talks with Afghanistan's Taliban government to end the ongoing conflict while demanding that Kabul must "demonstrate visible and verifiable actions" against terrorists.

Addressing the weekly press conference in Islamabad, Foreign Office Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said that talks were being held in the Chinese city of Urumqi between senior officials of the two countries.

When asked about the reported parleys between Pakistan and Afghanistan, he said Pakistan was looking "to stop border terrorism from Afghanistan".

"Our participation is a reiteration of our core concerns," he said. "The burden of real process, however, lies with Afghanistan, which must demonstrate visible and verifiable actions against terrorist groups using Afghan soil against Pakistan."

Answering a question on he Indian Ministry of External Affairs comment on Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir's reported remarks asking Shias to "go to Iran", he rejected India's remarks as "cynical and diversionary". —*PTI*

India's Ambassador JP Singh meets with Afghan Def Min Maulvi Mohammad Yaqub Akhund —x

— PTI

Gold futures drops to Rs 1.47 L/10g on strong dollar

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Gold prices plunged Rs 6,004 to Rs 1.47 lakh per 10 grams in futures trade on Thursday amid the intensi-fied West Asia crisis that boosted the US dollar and dampened the investors' sentiment. The yellow metal for the June delivery plunged Rs 6,004, or 3.91 per cent, to Rs 1,47,704 per 10 grams on the Multi Commod-ity Exchange. In the international markets, Comex gold futures for the June contract also ended a four-day rally, depreciating USD 194.70, or 4.05 per cent, to USD 4,618.40 per ounce. Jigar Trivedi, senior research analyst at IndusInd Securities said that the greenback has recently emerged as a safe-haven asset, putting pressure on dollar-denominated precious metals. Traders priced out the prospect of interest rate cuts in 2026.—*PTI*

Rupee records steepest gain at 93.14 against USD

MUMBAI, 2 APRIL

The rupee logged one of its steepest single-day gains and settled 156 paise higher or 1.6 per cent at 93.14 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday after the Reserve Bank took measures to restrict banks from onshore forward markets. The domestic unit, however, remained under pressure due to the unabated withdrawal of foreign capital, a strengthening dollar, and rising crude oil prices amid a volatile geopolitical situation, forex analysts said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 94.62 and registered a sharp single-day surge of 188 paise to touch an intra-day high of 92.82 against the greenback. The rupee breached the 95-level on 30 March before closing at 94.70 versus dollar. It settled at a historic low of 94.84 on 27 March.—*PTI*

Andhra logs highest March net GST at Rs 3,316 cr

AMRAVATI, 2 APRIL

Andhra Pradesh logged its highest-ever net GST collection for March at Rs 3,316 crore, marking a growth rate of 10 per cent for the month, a senior government official has said. "The state recorded 6 per cent GST growth in FY 2025–26, a notable achievement in the current economy," said State Taxes Chief Commissioner A Babu on Wednesday. Net GST collection in March 2025 was Rs 3,015 crore. Total GST collections across all sectors reached Rs 53,744 crore in the 2025-26 fiscal, compared to Rs 51,319 crore during the previous fiscal, indicating a growth of 4.73 per cent, he said. Andhra Pradesh shows stable, growth and better revenue performance.—*PTI*

India Post to adopt DoT's pension portal in a week

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Minister of Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia issued a one-week deadline to the Department of Posts on Thursday to integrate its pension services with the telecom department's 'SAMPANN' portal. The Minister said this during an event marking the 75th anniversary of the Postal Training Centre (PTC) in Saharanpur, where he also released a commemorative postage stamp to celebrate the institution's platinum jubilee. The Goa government and the Cochin Port Authority also signed agreements on the occasion to onboard onto the Department of Telecommunications' (DoT) digital platform, SAMPANN, to streamline pension disbursements. The (DoT) is now offering SAMPANN as a 'Platform as a Service' to departments, state governments, and public sector undertakings.—*PTI*

Markets rebound after falling 2% in early trade

Sensex rises 185 points, while Nifty reclaims 22,700 mark

MUMBAI, 2 APRIL

Stock markets pared early losses to close higher on Thursday, with the benchmark Sensex rising by 185 points and the broader Nifty settling above 22,700 on strong value buying in IT and banking shares and a sharp rebound in the rupee.

Rebounding more than 2,000 points from the day's low, the 30-share BSE Sensex finally settled higher by 185.23 points, or 0.25 per cent, at 73,319.55. The index opened lower and tanked further by 1,588 points to hit a day's low of 71,545.81 in the first half of the session.

The 50-share NSE Nifty closed above 22,700 at 22,713.10, up by 33.70 points, or 0.15 per cent. The index fell 496.85 points, or 2.19 per cent, in early trade before recovering to hit a high of 22,782.30.

A sharp rebound in the rupee after the Reserve Bank stepped in with a slew of measures to restrict banks from onshore forward markets also helped improve investor sentiment. The rupee rebounded by 188 paise to hit the 92 level against the US dollar briefly before settling over 150 paise higher.

A rebound in the rupee after the RBI took measures to restrict banks from onshore forward markets improved investor sentiment —*WIKIPEDIA*

Bargain hunting in IT stocks supported the recovery, with HCL Technologies and Tech Mahindra ending nearly 3 per cent higher.

Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC Bank, Bajaj Finance, Maruti Suzuki India, Titan, Axis Bank, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Kotak Mahindra Bank and ITC were the major gainers among Sensex shares.

On the other hand, Asian Paints, Eternal, Sun Pharmaceuticals, NTPC, Reliance Industries, PowerGrid, Mahindra & Mahindra, UltraTech Cement, Adani Ports, Bajaj

Brent crude traded 7.28 per cent higher at USD 108.52 per barrel. European markets were also trading lower.The US market ended significantly higher on 1 April.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 8,331.15 crore on 1 April, according to exchange data. Domestic institutional investors, however, bought stocks worth Rs 7,171.80 crore. —*PTI*

Sectors dependent on petrochemical feedstock and intermediates will benefit from the duty exemption—*AI IMAGE*

Govt exempts excise duty on petrochemicals

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

The government on Thursday exempted import of critical petrochemical products from customs duty for three months till 30 June, to ensure supply stability and provide relief to consumers of final products amid the West Asia crisis.

Sectors dependent on petrochemical feedstock and intermediates such as plastics, packaging, textiles, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, automotive components and other manufacturing segments will benefit from the duty exemption which will cost the exchequer Rs 1,800 crore.

The Finance Ministry said the measure has been taken as a temporary and targeted relief in order to ensure continued availability of critical petrochemical inputs for domestic industry, reduce cost pressures on downstream sectors and safeguard supply stability in the country.

This will also provide relief to consumers of final products, it added.

The goods on which the customs duty have been exempted by the government include methanol, anhydrous ammonia, toluene, styrene, dichloromethane (methylene chloride), vinyl chloride monomer, poly butadiene, styrene butadiene and unsaturated polyester resins.

Disruption in shipping routes amid the West Asia war has raised concerns over imports of fertiliser, crude oil and natural gas. India is a major importer of fertiliser and petroleum.

Global crude prices have risen by almost 50 per cent since the United States and Israel launched military strikes against Iran on February 28, triggering sweeping retaliation from Tehran.

The government had last week slashed excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 10 a litre and imposed an export duty of Rs 21.50 per litre on diesel and Rs 29.50 per litre on aviation turbine fuel.

Excise duty on petrol has been slashed to Rs 3 a litre, while on diesel it is zero currently. —*PTI*

Mfg sector growth slips to 4-yr low: PMI

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

India's manufacturing sector growth eased to a four-year low in March as cost pressures, heightened market uncertainty and the Iran war led to softer increases in new orders and output, a report said.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 56.9 in February to 53.9 in March.

In the PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

The two largest sub-components of the PMI, new orders and output, rose at the slowest rates since mid-2022, the survey said.

"Output and new orders slowed noticeably, signalling softer demand and greater uncertainty. Meanwhile, input costs rose sharply across a broad range of items, including aluminium, chemicals and fuels. For now, firms appear to be absorbing much of the increase, keeping output prices relatively contained," said Pranjul Bhandari, chief India economist at HSBC.

Firms faced an intensification of cost pressures, the steepest since August 2022. The rate of output price inflation receded to a two-year low, curbed by customer-retention efforts and attempts to secure new clients at some firms.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC Indian Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index fell from 56.9 per cent in February to 53.9 per cent in March —*ANI*

Indian manufacturers registered the strongest expansion in external sales since last September, with gains noted from clients in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Europe and other countries. —*PTI*

DoT extends SIM-binding deadline for messaging apps to 31 December

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

The Department of Telecom (DoT) has extended the SIM-binding deadline for mobile messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal to 31 December, following requests from industry stakeholders.

The SIM-binding rule requires messaging platforms to operate only if an active SIM card is present in the device.

The DoT has also removed the previous six-hour log-out requirement for the web versions of these apps, replacing it with a risk analysis-based log-out process.

Directions issued on 28 November 2025 mandated that app providers ensure services are linked to an active SIM card from 26 February.

The department introduced the SIM-binding rules to curb cybercriminal activities exploiting the security gap, which allowed frauds like cross-border scams and impersonation calls using Indian numbers. Accounts on messaging and calling apps continue to function even if the SIM is deactivated or moved abroad.

Industry bodies like Broadband India Forum have questioned its legality, citing a senior counsel's opinion that the directive is "ultra vires the parent legislation."

A survey by Cuts International says that 80 per cent of consumers and 60 per cent of small businesses anticipate operational disruptions due to the measures. —*PTI*

Discoms' legacy dues drop to Rs 3,300 cr from Rs 1.39L cr

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Outstanding legacy dues of power distribution utilities, or discoms, fell to Rs 3,300 crore in March this year from Rs 1.39 lakh crore in June 2022, Parliament was told.

The government notified the Electricity (Late Payment Surcharge and Related Matters) Rules, 2022, on 3 June 2022, classifying dues owed up to that date as legacy arrears, including late payment surcharges.

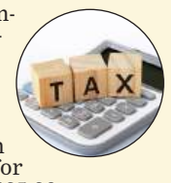
Discoms were required to reschedule these arrears through Equated Monthly Installments (EMIs), with current dues also being paid on time to avoid penalties.

The rules established a framework for the timely clearance of dues. As per the PRAAPTI portal, current dues stand at Rs 13,594 crore, with total dues—including legacy dues—amounting to Rs 16,894 crore as of 27 March 2026.

The Minister of State for Power, Shripad Naik, stated that the reduction was achieved through these measures. The Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana aimed at operational and financial turnaround, saw 27 states and 5 Union Territories signing memorandum of understandings. —*PTI*

Indirect tax: Government beats FY26 target of Rs 15.52 lakh crore

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL



The government marginally exceeded the indirect tax collection target for fiscal 2025-26, an official said on Thursday. However, the collection from health and national security cess, which is levied on pan masala manufacturing, missed the target.

Total indirect tax collections—comprising customs, excise, and GST—were pegged at over Rs 15.52 lakh crore in the Revised Estimates (RE) for FY26. The RE had pegged Rs 2,330 crore from the health and national security cess collection in FY26.

The actual collections for FY26 is 63 per cent of RE. This includes Rs 2.58 lakh crore from customs duty, Rs 3.38 lakh crore from excise duty, and Rs 9.58 lakh crore from Central Goods and Services Tax. —*PTI*

Rising yields trigger Rs 17,689 cr FPI outflow from FAR G-Sec

MUMBAI, 2 APRIL

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have withdrawn Rs 17,689 crore from Fully Accessible Route (FAR) government securities since the onset of the West Asia conflict, reflecting increased risk aversion and concerns over inflation driven by rising crude oil prices.

Data from the Clearing Corporation of India (CCIL) shows FPI investment in FAR government securities fell to Rs 3,13,318.661 crore as of 1 April, down from Rs 3,31,007.648 crore on 27 February, indicating a steady unwinding of positions in recent weeks.

Market sources say the outflows coincided with a sharp rise in domestic bond yields, especially after geopolitical tensions pushed global crude oil prices higher, heightening inflation risks and tightening financial conditions across emerging markets.

During this period, the yield on Indian government bonds, notably the 10-year benchmark, increased by approximately 0.33 per cent. On 27 March, the yield surpassed 7 per cent — the highest in over 20 months — indicating sustained selling pressure across investor segments.

Bond experts note elevated yields reduce bond attractiveness, prompting foreign investors to trim exposure, particularly in interest rate-sensitive segments like FAR government securities. —*PTI*

HDFC Bank's report suggests the 10-year bond yield may trade between 6.90 and 7.20 per cent in the near term —*ANI*

67% WORKERS GLOBALLY

'86% Indian workers faced workplace disruption'

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Employees in India experienced higher exposure to workplace disruption than the global average while also demonstrating a stronger push toward upskilling and skills validation, the Human Progress Report by Educational Testing Services (ETS) stated.

Princeton-based ETS, which conducts crucial exams like TOEFL and GRE, conducted the study, which found how the Indian workforce is navigating rapid shifts in technology, job responsibilities and performance expectations, as professionals increasingly link career stability to their ability to continuously build and demonstrate relevant skills.

86 per cent of workers experienced major workplace disruption, significantly higher than the global average of 67 per cent, who reported at least one major change during the past year.

Many professionals in India remain relatively confident about their ability to adapt and progress —*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

Many professionals in India remain relatively confident about their ability to adapt and progress, reflecting a workforce that is both under pressure to evolve and increasingly motivated to invest in future-ready capabilities.

The 2026 ETS Human Progress Report is based on a global survey capturing workforce trends across 18 countries.

"In the face of a changing job landscape, four in five workers building new skills, even though most can't envision their future job. Adaptability is becoming the new 'must have' skill," said Amit Sevak, the CEO of ETS.

The report also pointed to the growing integration of artificial intelligence into everyday work across India.

As career paths become less predictable, evidence of skills is critical to professional mobility and long-term relevance.There is need for clearer standards and systems to measure skills, it said. —*PTI*

Foreign fund in real estate falls 75% in 2026: Colliers

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Instututional investment in real estate fell by 61 percent —*FREEPIK*

Foreign investors' investments in Indian real estate declined sharply by 75 per cent to USD 400 million in January-March, amid the West Asia conflict, according to Colliers India.

The consultancy expects foreign investor caution to persist throughout the year due to global economic uncertainties.

Data showed total institutional investments in real estate fell by 61 per cent to USD 1.6 billion in Q1 2026 from USD 4.2 billion in October-December 2025.

Domestic investments amounted to USD 1.2 billion, while foreign investments were just USD 0.4 billion during the last quarter. In the previous quarter, inflows from domestic and foreign investors stood at USD 2.6 billion and USD 1.6 billion respectively.

Colliers India CEO Badal Yagnik stated that institutional investments remain resilient, supported by strong domestic demand. he said thiis phase will be transient, with India's favourable demographics and consumption-driven economy maintaining its regional position.

Global investments include AIFs, family offices, foreign banks, pension funds, and sovereign wealth funds. —*PTI*

-PTI

Thushara seeks court intervention to play in IPL

COLOMBO, 2 APRIL

Sri Lankan fast bowler Nuwan Thushara on Thursday sought a court order to secure his playing rights in the ongoing IPL after the country's cricket board refused to grant him a No Objection Certificate due to "failed fitness tests". The 31-year-old, contracted to Royal Challengers Bengaluru, filed a case in the Colombo District Court seeking an order directing Sri Lanka Cricket to issue the NOC. The case has been fixed for hearing on 9 April. According to local media reports, the player, who has made 30 T20 international appearances for his country since 2022, has pleaded that his contract with the SLC ended on 31 March and that he had no desire to seek an extension.—*PTI*

Kochhar in top-10 at Int'l Series Japan after first round

CHIBA, 2 APRIL

India's Karandeep Kochhar carded a solid four-under 67 in the opening round to move into the top 10 on the leaderboard at the USD 2 million International Series Japan here on Thursday. Kochhar is three shots behind leader Hongtaek Kim of Korea, who set the pace on the opening day with a superb seven-under 64. Teeing off from the 10th, Kochhar made nine consecutive pars on his opening nine before his round came alive with four birdies on the 1st, 4th, 6th, and 8th holes. Indian stalwarts Jeev Milkha Singh (T-85) and Gaganjeet Bhullar (T-103) shot rounds of one-over 72 and two-over 73, respectively, and will need to work hard to stay in the mix on Friday.—*PTI*

-PTI

Nielsen has stepped down as head coach

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Nils Nielsen is leaving as Japan coach less than two weeks after taking it to Women's Asian Cup glory, the football association said Thursday. Greenlander Nielsen led Japan to its third Asian title in four tournaments, beating host Australia 1-0 in the final in Sydney on 21 March. The 54-year-old had been in the job since December 2024. "Japan women's manager Nils Nielsen is stepping down following the expiry of his contract," the JFA said in a statement. Japan won plaudits for its performances at the Asian Cup, where it scored 29 goals and conceded just one. Nielsen described his team as "inspirational" and said he was "very lucky to be working with players that are that good".—*PTI*

Final ticket sales phase begins for FIFA WC 2026

LONDON, 2 APRIL

FIFA raised its top ticket price for the World Cup final to $10,990 (approximately Rs 10.19 lakh) during the glitch-hampered reopening of sales on Wednesday night after the 48-team field for this year's tournament was finalized. The price had been $8,680 when FIFA sold tickets after the tournament draw in December. FIFA's category 2 tickets for the July 19 game at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, were $7,380, up from $5,575, and category 3 cost $5,785, an increase of $4,185. Tickets were listed for 17 of the 72 group-stage matches by Wednesday night, and none of the knockout stage games.—*PTI*

CSK seek rhythm against potent Punjab Kings

It was an uninspiring start for CSK in their opener against RR

CHENNAI, 2 APRIL

Chennai Super Kings will need to improve significantly in all departments of the game to trouble a potent Punjab Kings in their first home game of the Indian Premier League here on Friday.

It was an uninspiring start for CSK in their opener against Rajasthan Royals.

CSK, now a team full of youngsters, did not get anything right in Guwahati and would simply like to leave that comprehensive defeat behind in a long tournament such as the IPL.

Considering how the Chennai surface played in the recent T20 World Cup, it should be a good batting wicket for the game on Friday.

While the injured MS Dhoni did not travel to Guwahati, he could be back in the dugout as a sounding board to captain Ruturaj Gaikwad while he nurses a calf strain. Sanju Samson, their biggest signing for the season, did not last long on his CSK debut and would be looking to make a big impact in front of home fans.

CSK did not have the services of their key batter Dewald Brevis against the Royals, and there is still no clarity over his recovery from a side strain.

Sarfaraz Khan was brought into the field as an impact player following the batting collapse. He did not last long, but looked comfortable in the middle in his first IPL game since the 2023 season.

More will be expected from youngsters like Kartik Sharma as the tournament progresses.

On the bowling front, the likes of Matt Henry and Noor Ahmad were made to look ordinary by the sheer belligerence of Vaibhav Sooryavanshi. They would be itching to bounce back from that pasting.

CSK take on last year's finalists, Punjab Kings, who have become a formidable unit in the Shreyas Iyer-Ricky Ponting era. As they aim to go all the way this season, they have found an able number three in Cooper Connolly, who anchored a tense chase against the Gujarat Titans on Tuesday night.

The middle-order wobbled in what should have been a straightforward chase, and that will push the team to produce a more convincing performance with the bat.

The match starts 7.30 PM IST. —*PTI*

There is a lot of expectation among the fans as to whether CSK will win the second match against Punjab Kings -*PTI*

Batting at number four gave me confidence: Sameer Rizvi

Young Delhi Capitals batter Sameer Rizvi grabbed the opportunity to bat at number four with both hands and said his only focus now is to maintain the consistency going forward in the IPL. Rizvi gave an ample display of his talent, coming in as an 'Impact Player' to help Delhi Capitals get past Lucknow Super Giants by six wickets after a shaky start here on Wednesday. Chasing 142, DC were reduced to 26 for 4 within the first five overs, but Rizvi (70 not out off 47 balls), coming in for T Natarajan, conjured an unbroken 119-run stand for the fifth wicket with the seasoned Tristan Stubbs (39 not out off 32 balls) to chase down the target in just 17.1 overs. Rizvi showed exemplary maturity during his knock and hit five fours and four sixes on a tricky track.

SA batter Rassie retires from int'l cricket

JOHANNESBURG, 2 APRIL

- The 37-year-old from Johannesburg, who hasn't turned up in national colours since March last year, played 18 Tests, 71 ODIs and 57 T20 Internationals after making his debut in 2018 as a 29-year-old.

Left out of this year's centrally-contracted list, South Africa batter Rassie van der Dussen on Thursday announced his international retirement without specifying any reasons, but said he will remain available for his domestic side Lions.

The 37-year-old from Johannesburg, who hasn't turned up in national colours since March last year, played 18 Tests, 71 ODIs and 57 T20 Internationals after making his debut in 2018 as a 29-year-old.

"It is with a proud heart and a profound sense of gratitude that I announce my retirement from international cricket," van der Dussen said in a statement on 'X'.

"To wear the Proteas jersey is a feat that demands a level of resilience and dedication that both tests and rewards you in the most incredible way. To have played for my country has been the greatest honour of my life.

"While my time in a Proteas shirt has come to an end, my journey is not over. I will continue to play for my beloved Lions, and I am committed to giving back to this beautiful game by teaching and mentoring the next generation of South African cricketers," he added in a lengthy post.

Van der Dussen made his debut in 2018 in a T20I against Zimbabwe before becoming an all-format player. He averaged over 50 for his 2,657 runs, including six hundreds and 17 fifties in ODIs, the format in which he seemed most effective.

Van der Dussen thanked his coaches, teammates and his wife for the support they gave him throughout his career.

"To my wife, Lara, you have been by my side every single step of the way. You have ridden the waves of incredible highs and difficult lows with empathy, grace and strength, and you have been my biggest cheerleader, whom I could not have done this without," he said. —*PTI*

Every cricketer should try golf from an early age: Yuvraj

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

World Cup-winning former India all-rounder Yuvraj Singh on Thursday said cricketers must take up golf from an early age to deal with the stress of their primary vocation.

Yuvraj, who has turned into an avid golfer after retirement, has been named the brand ambassador of the second Indian Golf Premier League. "They (cricketers) should play golf along with cricket. I should have played golf earlier, which would have helped me in cricket. Golf actually helps you unwind, take stress out of you," Yuvraj said on the sidelines of the unveiling of 10 franchises of the IGPL, the schedule of which is yet to be worked out.

"For example, all foreign cricketers, Australians, Kiwis, English, South Africans, all have been playing golf since they were young kids."

Yuvraj said golf is considered an elite sport, but it's a game that is accessible to all through public courses.

"We see golf as an elite sport, but we want every kid in India to try golf. We are trying to take golf to schools. What I feel is that every child should try every sport.

"I know cricket is our biggest game, but golf is also an exciting game, which everyone should try. As someone who has represented India, I want to help in other sports as well," he said. —*PTI*

Indian Golf Premier League Co-founder and Brand Ambassador Yuvraj Singh addresses the unveiling of the franchise line-ups in New Delhi -*PTI*

FIDE CANDIDATES 2026

Pragg and Divya find going tough in opening rounds

CYPRUS, 2 APRIL

India's R Praggnanandhaa, R Vaishali, and Divya Deshmukh have found the going tough in the FIDE Candidates 2026 tournament, happening in Cyprus.

At the end of the fourth round, Praggnanandhaa is the only one of the three to have claimed a win in the tournament so far – an opening-day triumph over Dutch GM Anish Giri. Despite the strong start, Praggnanandhaa is currently joint-third in the open standings, 1.5 points behind early pacesetter Uzbekistan's Javokhir Sindarov, who bettered the Indian GM in the third round. Meanwhile, in the women's section, Vaishali has strung together four draws and sits joint-third and is only 0.5 points behind leaders Anna Muzychuk and Bibisara Assaubayeva.

Thursday's rest day will allow the Indian trio to regroup and make a case to emerge as the next World Championship challengers.

But the road is only likely to get tougher. For Praggnanandhaa, of the 10 remaining games, four will be against pre-tournament favourites Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura. —*PTI*

Pragg and Divya -*PTI*

INDIA GEARS UP FOR BILLIE JEAN KING CUP

NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

India has begun their preparations for the upcoming Billie Jean King Cup Asia/Oceania Group I tournament in the national capital, with captain Vishal Uppal expressing confidence in a balanced squad that blends experience and youth.

The team assembled in Delhi earlier this week to acclimatise to the conditions ahead of the April 7-11 tournament, with Uppal stressing the importance of early preparation.

"We've just got here to Delhi... and come the 7th of April, we'll be ready to come out and fight for India. We really hope the people of Delhi come out in large numbers and support Team India," Uppal told PTI Videos.

Reflecting on last year's campaign, where India made the playoffs but fell short of advancing further, Uppal highlighted the need for collective effort.

"Tennis is an individual sport, but here it has to be a team effort. This year, all of us have to play our role and give our heart and soul day in and day out," he added.

India's recent performances underline steady progress in women's tennis. The team has qualified for the World Group playoffs twice in the last six years after a 42-year drought before 2020. —*PTI*

SAFF U20 final: India ready for B'desh rematch

MALDIVES, 2 APRIL

A familiar rivalry will take centre stage when the India Under-20 men's team faces Bangladesh in the final of the SAFF U-20 Championship 2026 at the National Stadium in Malé, Maldives, on Friday.

With both sides having shared intense contests in recent times, including a 1-1 draw in the group stage, the summit clash promises another gripping encounter where composure and belief could decide the title.

India heads into the final aiming to defend its crown and secure a fifth SAFF trophy at this level. The weight of history, therefore, will add to the intensity.

India head coach Mahesh Gawali acknowledged the challenge posed by Bangladesh. "It won't be easy. Bangladesh is an aggressive and talented side, and it will be tough for us. Moreover, there will be a lot of support for them in the stadium. —*PTI*

India's woeful Shotgun WC campaign ends without a medal

TANGIER, 2 APRIL

Indian shooters' disappointing run showed no signs of abating, as both mixed team pairs turned in sub-par performances to finish way down in the standings, capping a forgettable outing at the ISSF Shotgun World Cup here on Thursday.

Extending India's run of underwhelming results in the men's and women's skeet and trap events, the mixed doubles pair of Olympian Prithviraj Tondaiman and Kirti Gupta could only muster an aggregate of 134, slumping to a disappointing 18th place in a 33-team field.

Only the top four teams enter the finals.

Prithviraj Tondaiman -*PTI*

Tondaiman scored 69 (24, 22, 23) in his three rounds of 25 each, totalling 75, while Gupta missed 10 clay targets to finish with 65 (22, 22, 21).

The other Indian pair, Olympians Kynan Chenai and Rajeshwari Kumari, also endured a below-par outing, combining for a modest 130 to finish 25th.

Chenai shot 68 (25, 21, 22), while Rajeshwari managed 62 (18, 22, 22), in the season-opening World Cup an event whose scores carry significant weight for selection for the Asian Games in Japan later this year. —*PTI*

SALAH BIDS GOODBYE

Egypt star begins farewell tour with Liverpool

LIVERPOOL, 2 APRIL

Mohamed Salah's long goodbye to Liverpool begins on Saturday in the quarterfinals of the FA Cup, the competition that represents his best chance of a trophy in his final year at Anfield.

The Egyptian winger announced last week that he will be leaving Liverpool at the end of the season after nine years at a club where he has broken scoring records and established himself as one of the world's best players. Salah potentially has 15 games left in the famous red shirt: Seven in the Premier League, as well as three in the FA Cup and five in the Champions League, should Liverpool reach the final in both of those competitions.

In the Champions League, defending champion Paris Saint-Germain is up next in the two-leg quarterfinals, and it's pretty much as tough in the FA Cup, with Liverpool handed an away match at Manchester City.

Salah, who has 255 goals in 435 appearances for Liverpool, missed the Reds' last game before the international break — a 2-1 loss at Brighton in the league — with a muscle injury but has told manager Arne Slot he should be healthy enough to return this weekend.

"He just does so much for his body for such a long time that he recovers so fast," Slot said on Wednesday. "So, he will train with the team again tomorrow, and if everything works well, then he's available to be with us at City."

The 33-year-old Salah was left out of the Liverpool team for four straight games at the end of 2025 in what appeared to be a breakdown in his relationship with Slot and the club.

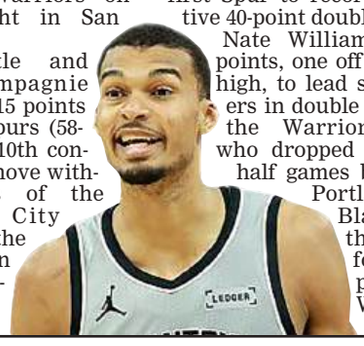
Since returning from the Africa Cup of Nations, Salah has been an ever-present in the lineup, seemingly winning the Dutch coach's round. —*PTI*

NBA roundup: Victor nets 41 to lead Spurs

BERLIN, 2 APRIL

Victor Wembanyama matched his season-high with 41 points and had a game-high 18 rebounds in a record-setting performance, propelling the San Antonio Spurs to a 127-113 romp over the short-handed Golden State Warriors on Wednesday night in San Francisco.

Stephon Castle and Julian Champagnie chipped in with 15 points apiece for the Spurs (58-18), who used a 10th consecutive win to move within two games of the Oklahoma City Thunder atop the Western Conference standings.

Wembanyama's 41 points came in just 29 minutes to match his season-best total from San Antonio's previous game at home against the Chicago Bulls on Monday. Having totalled 16 rebounds in the Chicago game, Wembanyama became the first Spur to record consecutive 40-point double-doubles.

Nate Williams had 18 points, one off his career high, to lead seven players in double figures for the Warriors (36-40), who dropped two-and-a-half games behind the Portland Trail Blazers in their duel for ninth place in the West. —*PTI*